

Overmorrow by starsprout

Series: The Children of the Sun [1]

Category: Stray Kids (Band)

Genre: Action/Adventure, Adventure, Alternate Universe - Dystopia, Alternate Universe - Science Fiction, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Character Death, Eventual Romance, Eventual Smut, Fictional epidemic, Forced Pregnancy, Found Family, Gore, HEAVY mention of miscarriage, HOW DID I FORGET TO TAG ANGST GOD, M/M, Male Lactation, Medical Procedures, Medical Trauma, Mpreg, Multi, Pining, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Post-War, Revolution, SLOW BURN x3, Slow Burn, Unrequited Love, Violence, and abortion, corrupt society, diverse settings, genetic mutation, mainly Jisung centric, no major !, parents minsung, plot heavy, there is some fluff, world building

Characters: Bang Chan, Han Jisung | Han, Hwang Hyunjin, Kim Seungmin, Lee Felix (Stray Kids), Lee Minho | Lee Know, OC Characters - Character, Seo Changbin, Stray Kids Ensemble, Yang Jeongin | I.N

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Summary:

Jisung was seven when a new infectious disease broke out, killing females mercilessly.

Jisung was seven when women were then announced as critically endangered.

Jisung was eight when the government informed the rest of their population about their plans to make males carry.

Jisung was ten when they successfully found a way for males to carry.

And Jisung was eleven when he lost everything for the future of humanity

→

"Because I care about tomorrow," he mutters, lifting his head. His youthful face has been mauled away by the rampaging plague of tiredness and his eyes are dull and dimming. "I'm fighting because I believe we deserve a tomorrow." He tightens the bandage making him wince a little bit. "Because I want to see tomorrow, I want to see overmorrow and the days that follow, the months, the years," He breathes deep. "Because I refuse for this to be the end."

Relationships: Bang Chan/Lee Felix, Han Jisung | Han/Lee Felix, Han Jisung | Han/Lee Minho | Lee Know, Hyunjin/oc, Kim Seungmin/Seo Changbin, OC X OC, oc x skz

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1. Prologue

Author's Note:

HELLLOOOO this is my first skz fic and im beyond excited gosh im almost jumping out of my skin lmao

This fic is so much different to anything i've done and i love it so much!! I just wanted to say before we start to take the tags very seriously bc it is quite a heavy fic (again 0-0) and the themes in the tags are mentioned a lot... like a lot so if they make you uncomfy please be careful!

Lots of love!!! <3333

Jisung had unknowingly watched the downfall of humanity at the age of seven.

He had overlooked it entirely and had eventually figured out the dire situation at the last moment possible.

The world looked the same to him. The same daily struggle to fill his stomach, his parents struggling alongside him. The world wasn't fair to anyone now. Jisung knew that at the tender age of seven, but the truth about the disarray the world was in was sheltered from his mind, never quite grasping the full concept of it until he was too late.

Recalling back, Jisung couldn't tell anyone when he really started to notice that something was different.

His days bled into one another, too similar to pinpoint them as different dates.

Survival was his motive. His parents motive and his friends motive.

Finding ways to get food under the nose of the government was hard, harder than what it had sounded at first when his parents had

explained why he was the one to sneak out their enclosed town and into the scary wilderness all by himself.

Jisung's days weren't like the children his age that lived outside of the slums, contained by concrete walls to protect them from the outside dangers. They roamed within their safe concrete box with each other, toys that Jisung wouldn't ever be able to afford in their grips and spending their free time playing with each other.

Instead of playing around with the other children in the slums all day, they formed small groups and raided farms from outside the concrete walls, finding new ways to sneak in and escape the grip of the angry farmers.

Jisung brought whatever food he could find back to his parents in their tiny one-roomed shack. If they were lucky, which was so rare, Jisung who had only been taught the numbers up to ten, could count the times a small loaf of stale bread was waiting on the only table in their home.

His mother would try her best to make the scraps Jisung brought home into something they could stomach, usually cooked into a watery soup.

He was focused on the tasks his parents gave him, too busy trying to not be seen sneaking into the resisted wilderness that held an abundance of berry bushes, wild root vegetables and fish swimming in the ponds. Although they were difficult to catch, Jisung tried his best to capture the slippery things, only succeeding three times.

Jisung was too busy trying to keep himself and his parents fed that he had missed the arrival of government officials, dressed in hazmat gear and leaving with full body bags.

He had missed the families grieving in his daze of survival.

The disease wasn't uncommon in the slums and the first time Jisung had seen them, dragging three bags on stretchers in their grasp, he hadn't thought much except to try to avoid the areas affected by the infection

Jisung was playing around with a young girl who had become one of his only friends, throwing a ball made of twigs to each other when a group of men had appeared in their home, sticking out like a sore thumb against the brown and weary backdrop of the slums that surrounded their colourful clothed bodies.

The leader of them, situated just in front of the other four men, cleared his throat and Jisung had put the makeshift ball down and clasped Jooyeon's hand, and crept closer, wearily.

"Hello," The man had said coldly, no hint of emotion in his tone at all. He sounded robotic and it sent a wave of uneasiness down Jisung's spine. He had taken a step back, bumping into Jooyeon's chest in the process.

"Take this home to your parents, it is an announcement from the government of the utmost importance," and gingerly, Jisung had plucked the envelope from the man's grip and with a look in his friend's eyes, they bolted away.

"What do you think it is?" Jooyeon had asked, peering over Jisung's shoulder as he opened the paper envelope. Both had deflated from their excitement when Jisung had opened the letter, finding a script that they both didn't know how to read.

Jisung had wandered home, Jooyeon on his tail, wondering if his parents could decipher the message written across the paper.

But Jisung's parents had grown up in the same environment as their son, only concerned about surviving and not privileged enough to afford education, and had shrugged.

It seemed the little paper envelopes had spread all over the slums and within the new commotion, Jisung and his parents had been attracted to the new crowd.

A granny, looking close to crossing the river sat against a wooden beam and read out words from the letter, a horrified expression painted over her old, wrinkled face.

And the words flowing out of her mouth had seemed to shock

everyone.

But Jisung was just a child and the words that had seemed to affect the adults in hearing distance had flown through his ears, leaving him confused and whining to his mother who had paled and slowly backed away from the crowd.

She had scooped up her tiny son in her own frail arms, weakened from malnutrition and ran.

“A new plague has been born! One hundred percent of victims are females, of any age! Protect your females!”

Jisung was seven when a new infectious disease broke out, killing females mercilessly.

Jisung had noticed the changes in his mother. She was more alert, never daring to leave the house unless it was absolutely necessary. Jisung was beginning to understand something was wrong.

Jooyeon had lost her mother not many days ago, leaving the girl distant and not wanting to play with Jisung, and soon enough, Jisung found that seeing girls and women of any age were becoming scarce.

Maybe because they were scared, maybe because they had come down with the infectious disease, or maybe they were taking extra precaution, trying to protect themselves against the rampant disease.

Jisung was seven when the declaration came. Women were then announced as critically endangered.

Contact had spread the disease from woman to woman, poisoning their wombs first and once that had started, it would spread to their blood, their own blood that once kept them alive and well flowing like toxic poison in their veins.

Organs would shut down from the toxicity and then, it was impossible to live. Wombs had been cut out once they showed signs, but once signs started, it was already too late.

There were no cures, none so far and everything they had tried, the disease fought its way around it, sucking the life out from the inside out.

Jisung had his own mother, her precaution must've saved her life so far, but other than that he hadn't seen many women or even young girls at all.

His own friend, Jooyeon had passed not long after her mother had, catching the disease from her and dying prematurely, even before her womb had even awoken.

Women and young girls were dropping dead like flies. And soon enough, the population had dipped so much, the government had no choice but to find a way so humans wouldn't die out.

Jisung was just barely eight when the announcement came, plastered to crumbling buildings from the previous war, all around the slums, even. Jisung couldn't read and the granny that had read them the last declaration had passed, dying from old age instead from the disease.

Her grandson was still alive, however, and he was lucky enough to learn the script from his late grandmother. Jisung had stood next to the man, holding onto his father's hand. They were out together, going to sneak into the wilderness and try to fish from the ponds together when they had seen the gasping crowd around the man.

Not a woman in sight.

Jisung, sweet little Jisung who only knew the struggle to fill his belly and the warmth of his parents' hugs, had understood exactly what this message meant.

Jisung was eight when the government informed the rest of their population about their plans.

“With the new downfall of women, humanity itself is threatened. Without our women, we will cease to exist. The future now lays in our hands! The best scientists have gathered to find a way to save our race! Without women only men will exist, we must find a way to make males carry children,”

The pale faces around Jisung had heightened his sudden discomfort. His brows had furrowed tightly and he looked up to his father.

“Daddy?” He had whispered softly. His father had looked down at him, his jaw clenched tightly. “Yes?” He answered back, his voice rough and sounding like he was suppressing his emotions.

“Mama said boys don’t have babies,” he had said, cocking his head to the side. “How could they do that?”

“I don’t know, Jisung,” His father had answered. “I don’t know,”

When Jisung finally turns ten, the only woman he has seen in months is his own mother. He’s grateful. Incredibly so.

He’s older now, old enough to understand the gravity of the problem weighing down on society. When his mother’s middle starts to grow outwards, Jisung understands.

Her bump becomes prominent and it steals Jisung's comfortable seat on her lap quickly. But Jisung is entranced. His mother has lived through this disease and had come to show Jisung why the world was in such shambles.

This disease was taking the gift of life from them.

And when his little sister is born months later, Jisung feels a weight of panic settle in him.

When he stared down at his new little sister, Jisung had broken out into a fit of tears.

Jisung finally understood.

When all the women die, everyone will eventually die.

But unlike the usual life and death, there will be no more life given out.

Just a month after his little sister's birth, when he's wandering over to the wild, a loud noise attracts him to another large crowd of men.

The spectacle reminds him of all his other run-ins and he turns on his heels quickly, wanting to go fetch his father to tell him about the news, but the booming voice stops him.

"The mission to find a way for males to carry has finally succeeded! They have found a cure to the crisis!"

Jisung halts, his heart dropping into his stomach that prompts churns.

Jisung is ten when they successfully find a way for males to carry.

He had run home as fast as his little legs could take him and when he finally reached his little home and badly told his parents, their reactions were much different than what he had originally expected.

They smile widely and comment briskly on it before going back to smother his sister with love. Jisung had slowly approached and snuggled into his father's side, a twinge of loneliness tugging in his gut.

Not long after that, Jisung turned eleven and not even two weeks after his birthday, advertisements for the repopulation project had popped up everywhere. Bright posters, dragging you in and filling you with hope. Televised ads, billboards in the Capital.

Jisung didn't need to know how to read to know what it was about. He didn't even dare pick it up to take back home.

The weeks that followed were strange.

Jisung felt on edge. There was a persistent tingle in his gut, something that told him something was wrong. As he watched on as his parents slept on the only bed in the house, his sister cradled between them—the spot he used to sleep before his mother had kicked him out with her stomach bulging with life—he felt a wave of uneasiness wash over him.

He pinned it to the lack of food he's had lately. He'd been knocked down from his parent's main receiver of affection, sleeping on the cold floor had told him he wasn't just imagining it either.

When the morning came Jisung was pulled out of his sleep harshly when a hand gripped his small bicep and promptly picked him up like he was nothing but a weightless twig. He had gasped loudly as he was pulled to his feet.

“Dad,” he breathed out, not even having the time to brush the sleep from the corners of his eyes. “You need to get dressed,” he comments and Jisung felt a pit of worry form in his stomach at the lack of emotion in both his father's voice, but across his face.

There was not one clue to tell Jisung what's going on.

He had looked over to his mother who was busy with the baby.

“Mama,” he had called out gently with a pout on his lips. “Dad hurt my shoulder,” he whined, rubbing the part of his arm where his shoulder connected.

But she didn't answer.

And the whole morning while he had gotten dressed and ate some of the leftover watery stew over the fire, she had only given him one long hug.

But it felt wrong. Jisung would've collapsed into her warmth if it wasn't for the tenseness in her body.

Something was wrong but Jisung for the life of him couldn't figure it

out.

“I’ve not seen these clothes before, Mama,” He had called out, fingering at the cotton shirt and pants that must’ve cost them their whole year’s savings.

It was weird.

He had received no answer, the only thing talking to him the rapid beating of his anxious heart.

His mother hadn’t left their little home since she had fallen pregnant so it didn’t surprise him when his father ushered him wordlessly out of the door, she hadn’t followed with his sister.

Jisung had stared up to his father, confusion morphing across his features. His father hadn’t looked down to him, instead, he had swooped down and promptly gathered his small-framed son in his arms, sitting him on his hip.

Jisung was eleven now, he had deemed himself a big boy now, but when he had tried to wriggle from his father’s grip, it grew tighter until he gave up, his chin tucked into his father’s neck.

His father hadn’t carried him like this since he was a toddler. But there was something so strangely scary about it.

Jisung hadn’t figured it out until it was too late.

He had only lifted his head after waking up from a dreamless sleep. His father was talking to someone when he turned his neck and suddenly his eyes were filled with the colour grey as he stared at the walls of the inner Capital.

His father finished talking and then walked in through the guarded gates.

Jisung felt his stomach flip.

“Why are we here?” He had then asked, panicked but no answer came. And then he had felt the pressure of tears welling in his eyes. “What’s going on?”

The more he asked, the more the silence surrounded him and panic would encase him in its freezing grasp.

Jisung barely had time to take in the new world around him. Buildings were held together, not breaking in at the roofs or a broken window. Everything was neat, put together and if Jisung had a word for it he'd choose secure.

A crowd grew in his vision, all looking much better off than anyone else Jisung has seen in his eleven years, with the exception of the very few government officials on business in the slums.

His father had only put him down, grabbing the neck of his shirt once they entered the line amongst the crowd. Jisung wanted to cry out, cling to his father's body but fear had frozen him over and he couldn't bear to move his body.

His father had dragged him along, his well-worn shoes scraping over the pavement beneath them. He recalls whimpering, his nails digging into his father's wrist almost deep enough to break through his skin and pierce his flesh.

"Dad," he had whispered, only for it to fall dead on his lips as he suddenly came face to face with another man, older than his father but not yet old enough to be called old.

"Ah what a lovely young boy!" He had cheered and his words had made Jisung's stomach churn and his spine shiver. His father's grip had tightened around his shirt. "And what's his name, age, address?"

His father had cleared his throat and given out the details in a monotone voice.

"And you must sign here," the man points to the paper he was filling out. Then his father opens his mouth and Jisung feels his heart drop completely.

"I heard there was a reward if you surrender them to the government," his father stopped when Jisung whimpered out loudly.

"Oh!" The man had cheered loudly. "Of course, this one could go for a lot... you still must sign, oh, here and here!"

Jisung then backed up to his father's legs. "Dad!" He screamed loudly and this time, a flush of warm tears flowed down his chubby cheeks. "What are you doing?"

But his cries were ignored and the only other thing Jisung remembers from that dreaded day was rough hands pulling him from his father and the image of his father wandering away, a stack of money in his grip that would allow his family to live comfortably.

Jisung was eleven years old when was sold to the institution, given up without a word from his parents.

And here he has remained in the same place for seven years.

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Notes for the Chapter:

Please tell me what you think so far in the comments
they truly make my day!!

Lots of love!!!!

2. 1→

Notes for the Chapter:

make sure you're aware of the tags and warnings!

Warning! nonconsensual genetic mutation/medical procedures!

Jisung groans out loudly, pulling the thin sheet over his head and rolling over onto his side before promptly returning to his back, whining loudly as he pounds his fist down on the mattress beneath him.

It had been seven years since this same pain had started, but Jisung just knows he's never going to be able to tolerate it any time soon.

His hips are aching and his abdomen cramping which distracts him from his task of sleeping. "Fuck this," he mutters beneath his breath before flinging himself out of bed, pushing his feet into the slippers next to his bed and pressing a green button beside his door.

The telltale ding sounds out through the sound system and Jisung presses his lips together in a fine line before making his way back to his bed, cuddling up with the single sheet and blanket given to him.

Five minutes later, a nurse is entering his room, a cart with him and Jisung sighs heavily. Even if they press the green button for the most mediocre reasons, a check-up is needed.

They were the key to a successful future after all.

"What is wrong tonight, Han Jisung?" He mutters and Jisung raises his eyebrows. "Cramps," He answers simply. The nurse sighs and signals for the boy to lay down. "Do we have to do this every time?" Jisung mutters and the nurse nods. "If you die at my hands," the nurse shivers at the mere thought.

Jisung rolls his eyes and promptly pulls his shirt up, shuffling to pull his pants to sit at his lower hips, his lower abdomen on full display. Jisung winces when the gel is squirted on his skin and sighs loudly

when the instrument digs down into his abdomen.

“Looks good,” the nurse comments. “Uterus is getting a great amount of blood flow!” The nurse then cheers and hands Jisung a pill. “There you go,” he then ticks off several boxes on his chart. “Soon enough I won’t be called in here in the middle of the night to give you this,” Jisung’s brows furrow deeply at the thought of the upcoming events. Jisung rolls his eyes as he’s passed some water to swallow the pill. The nurse then shrugs. “Sleep well,” he murmurs before exiting the room.

But Jisung has never had a good sleep for the past seven years he’s remained here, and he is sure that his sleep these next few months will be the worst of his life. The nurse’s words echo throughout his mind until Jisung feels like he can’t breathe anymore, a hot burning exploding in his chest.

But Jisung doesn’t cry. There are almost no more tears he can possibly shed. It was hopeless, a fruitless act that would only make him physically drained, there was nothing positive about crying about his situation. Not anymore.

Jisung had never wanted this.

Ever since he was eight, the thought had brought negative emotions to the surface and they have never once left.

He entered at eleven and ever since then Jisung has felt as if he’s been stuck in a nightmare. The continuous medical procedures, the prodding and poking. The change of his biological makeup.

They had taken everything from him since the day his father had sold him, surrendered him to the institution. Jisung had no one to advocate for him, no one to say that what they were going to do to him was a choice.

Jisung’s life was in the hands of the government. There was not a single part of him that belonged to himself now.

When he was eleven they were quick to gather everything they

needed from him to change him. Jisung remembers the day as clear as day. And as soon as they had what they needed, Jisung was sedated and never the same.

No matter how hard he'd like to forget it, his body will never be able to let him.

He could do nothing but lay there, limp from drugs as they pulled out a large needle and injected stem cells into him.

It was the scientific breakthrough of the century, maybe even the last few centuries, but all Jisung felt was hatred.

He had no voice here. He couldn't say no to anything and if he were to refuse, he'd be forced. There was no protection for him here, it was just him, the white walls and disgust building up in his gut every time he thought of himself.

It had worked, of course. The stem cells, harvested from his own body were artificially modified, made to eventually grow into a fully functioning uterus were injected into his body just as he was about to hit puberty. He had been sold at the perfect age to start this process, there was no such thing as settling in period.

The pain of growing another organ that was never supposed to be in his body in the first place had ripped through him like no pain ever had. It only grew worse after six months after the injection. From then on, growth hormones were delivered straight to the growing organ after being deemed both big enough too and attached and forming an entrance, just a few inches inside the rectum.

Jisung would lay awake all night, trying desperately to ignore the pounding and pulsing inside his abdomen. There was no escape from the pain of an extra organ growing into his body, creating changes that went against his biology. Jisung could do nothing but allow his body to grow an extra organ he should've never had.

The first two years he spent in the institution were a hazed over with the memory of pain. Jisung didn't want to remember, but his body will never let him forget.

And as soon as the pain had stopped when he was thirteen, ultrasounds had deemed his uterus fully developed, equipped with fully functioning ovaries, which carried his own genetics, and a birthing canal.

The next three years he was monitored almost every single second of the day. During the stem cell modification process, they had strengthened the walls of the uterus and somehow they had found a way for these artificial uteri to recycle the uterine lining, although it caused much more severe pain than the average shedding process, which ultimately eliminated changed the make up of these wombs, they had zero to none chance of catching the deadly disease.

When he was deemed fully developed, Jisung had found himself in the treatment room, people filling into the room as he sat as stiff as a board on the treatment bed, eyeing the doctors and scientists all around him.

In all the commotion, Jisung had seen a young boy, his age no less or more standing right next to the doctor that had treated him his whole life in the facility. Jisung had felt shame creep up his neck, painting his ears a bright red.

His ears had rung when the doctor stood closer, in his gloved hands a sharp instrument and an inch long, thin metal rod.

Jisung didn't have time to scream when he cut the skin open on his bicep, promptly pushing the metal rod far into his flesh. He had jolted at the sudden pain, tears pricking in his eyes and teeth gritted.

He had made eye-contact with the boy. He had squirmed under Jisung's gaze, holding the clipboard tighter to his chest and gulping.

Jisung found out two hours later what the metal rod was for and it left him with a hand pushing down onto the new wound on his left arm. It would control all his hormones in his body, regulating oestrogen and progesterone levels through his body, promoting ovulation, and Jisung, who had only just forgotten about the crippling pain the growth of the dreaded organ had caused, was left realising that this was only the start.

Three months was all it took to regulate the functions of the artificial uterus.

And with that came Jisung's greatest fear at the time, becoming fertile and physically able to carry a baby.

He was sixteen.

Jisung was certain, not an ounce of doubt had filled him, that they would've made the move to get him pregnant as soon as possible if it wasn't for his tiny body.

He had failed to reach a healthy weight, the percentage of fat on his body too low to carry a baby and they were worried about how thin he was, his waist tiny and his hips frail. So they did the most logical thing they could think of.

Jisung was pumped with a higher dose of oestrogen for a few months and Jisung could do nothing but slowly watch his body change from right under his eyes. His hips had changed shape and fat had settled around his hips, plumping out the tops of his thighs until the gap he used to always have was close to being filled. Jisung had panicked when he began feeling a tender feeling in his chest, but they had taken him off the dose as soon as he had hit his weight mark and because of his previous state his body had been in, they kept an eye on him for six more months, making sure he held onto the new shape and fat.

Jisung had.

Just days after his seventeenth birthday, Jisung was taken back to the treatment room, not knowing anything they were planning on doing to him. Every time they collected him, leading him to the treatment room, two burly men by his side just in case he decided to act on his own whims, he felt the flare of heat enter his chest, spreading out to his body and lighting him on fire.

Jisung didn't even bother to resist anymore. There was absolutely nothing he could say that would give him back his rights as a person. Ever since his family had given him up —sold him — His rights as a person had disappeared, only to be squeezed in the

government's grip.

Jisung didn't know many of the other boys here, he had met most of them, but he had never bothered to try to make friends with them.

When he was eleven, he had been too shut off, too traumatised from his family's decision to even socialise with anyone and as he got older, he refused to let anyone in, annoyed at anyone's presence.

Jisung knew it wasn't normal, or healthy at all but there was a numbing feeling that grew inside him every time he was alone, and there were only two options for him.

Numbness or feel everything.

And physically, Jisung already felt enough to remind him, he didn't need emotions too.

But he was always anxious at the thought of going to the treatment room. He walked in like a sheep being led to its death, on high alert and jolts of nerves exploding inside him. He was lead to the bed and he sits down, his body language void of any emotion.

Jisung had grown too well at hiding all his emotions. They didn't do him any good here, anyway.

His doctor is in the room and standing by his side is the same boy he recalls seeing when he received his hormone implant. He's holding onto another clipboard and he's taller, his pitch-black locks longer. Jisung stares into his dark brown eyes and the boy falters from his gaze. He drops it first, licking his plump lips quickly.

"You've made nice progress, Jisung," His doctor comments. Jisung huffs in response. They don't press for an answer. They had gotten used to his wordless remarks. Jisung had thought a few times maybe he'd be taken out of the program because of his personality. He's sure they didn't wish to repopulate the earth with babies that could turn out just like him.

But Jisung had heard them talk.

Parents inflict the way children behave and there was an easy

solution to that problem. Change the parent.

Jisung had felt his heart drop, but he had forced it from his mind. He was meant to be disgusted by this, and he was, but the thought of all this just to go through it all again, gaining no outcome from it all, that had hurt a lot more than Jisung was prepared to admit.

“Today marks the last stage before you’ll be completely ready for pregnancy,” Jisung stiffens. He eyes the doctor and he feels like he’s going to throw up. The mere thought of falling pregnant causes a flurry of panic through him and the worst part is that he knows he can do nothing to get himself out of this.

He had tried before, of course. He was fifteen when he first tried.

In the dead of night, he had broken out of his room and just as the alarm had started he ran, running for his life. He had made it to the outside gardens where they were allowed to go during the day.

Jisung was running on pure desperation.

He had been caught, hands wrapping around his waist and tugging him back to his room. He had been sedated and for the next three days, a groggy headache had reminded him of his fruitless efforts and a brand new tracking device in his thigh.

Jisung now wishes he at least tried to think about it in more detail. He knew he’d never make it out of here by himself, so he doesn’t even bother to try to think of an escape plan.

Right now, however, Jisung wishes that he had cashed right into the electrifying fence and broken out forcibly.

Jisung can do nothing but glare into the boy’s eyes as the doctor injects the last hormone drug into him. They said it was to open his maternal side, his want and desire to keep the children he’d become full with one day safe and sound.

But Jisung knew they’d be taken away from him.

He blames it on the new drugs, but for the next month on the drug, his sleep is plagued by the terrible nightmares of watching his

newborn children being snatched right from his arms. Jisung had woken up crying.

Then news had floated around the facility.

He ends up in the garden, pulling on the wide-legged white pants up to his knees, allowing the autumn breeze to graze past his legs. There were no boys around but even if they were here none made an effort to talk to Jisung. They were different from him.

As far as Jisung knew, he was the only person that spent every single hour of his day in the facility. He had seen the others in passing, mostly from treatment rooms or chatting with nurses in the halls, dressed in normal clothing while Jisung looked like he was a lifelong patient at the hospital.

He had heard the nurses chatting in the halls on his way to the gardens.

His chest feels tighter and there's a blockage in his heart. Jisung tries to breathe, blend in with the breeze blowing softly but there's a dull ache that remains.

"Did you know Jeongwoo?" One of the nurses had asked. Jisung had remembered him. He was the oldest in the facility, coming in when they were finalising the treatments at twelve. He had to be twenty-one at least.

Jisung had recalled seeing him a few months ago, his middle growing and Jisung remembers how he had froze and scrambled back in the opposite direction, not ready for any interaction with him. Jeongwoo would've urged him to become pregnant soon, Jisung knew him as a man that had always harped on about how he wished another boy would be in the same situation as him so they could provide each other comfort.

Jisung refused to be that boy.

"The oldest one?" The taller nurse had whispered back. They weren't

doing a very good job since Jisung could hear their conversation from behind the nearest corner.

“Yeah! That one, his nurse, Jiyoung was just arrested and put into custody,” Jisung had stiffened and straightened his spine out, trying his best to listen to their quieting whispers.

“What?” The other nurse hissed. “Yeah” the deep voice replies. “Apparently he had gone into labour and refused for Jiyoung to send for anyone,”

“So?”

“Jiyoung did send people, but Jeongwoo refused medical help,” the men were whispered in quiet voices by this point but Jisung could hear them as clear as day over his rapidly beating heart. “So?”

“They died,” the man grits out to the other man who gasps. “The boy and the baby,”

Fear coils in Jisung's stomach. Of course, the first child to be born from this mess just had to die alongside the man who had been through years of pain to get to that stage of his life.

For a little bit, Jisung had feared that he'd die himself. But he knew that he couldn't do anything to save his child from their grip and there was absolutely no point in refusing medical attention.

Four months after the first shot of the new drugs and a handful of new injections to speed up ovulation, Jisung was pulled back into the treatment room.

This time, he was glad the boy his age wasn't present for him to glare at.

He was drugged almost as soon as he entered and even through the drugged daze he was in, he could feel their hands on him, entering his womb and retrieving eggs from him. Jisung had laid there, embarrassed and feeling violated.

Hours had passed and he was still sedated when another male nurse had returned. He wheeled in a cart, a few machines on the bottom and on the top he carefully passed a dish to another nurse as he began to set up the same machine that they used hours prior.

Then it hit Jisung, what was about to happen. He had thought maybe he'd have a few days to get his body in terrible condition, but apparently, they knew him better than he thought.

Implantation day.

Jisung would have screamed if he could. Fear sparked in his eyes and he tried to open his mouth, but all he got out was a strangled whimper. The doctor situated in between his bare lower half had the indecency to pat his thigh, probably with the thought that it would comfort the boy.

But Jisung wanted to jolt out of his skin and run away as far as possible.

Jisung was seventeen when he fell pregnant for the very first time.

He stays in his room for the first three weeks after the implantation.

The second week after the implantation, his results came back positive, but Jisung didn't truly believe it until on the third week, he started to show the typical symptoms and Jisung was absolutely horrified. He had been left in a crippling state of anxiety after the implantation.

Maybe if they had told him prior what they were planning to do to him it could have helped, Jisung doubted it ever would've but he was left feeling all different ways of violated.

They had violated his right to know what was happening to his body, they had violated his choices and they had violated him by taking everything from him without his consent.

Not once had they asked for his consent.

Jisung tried to not grow attached. He tried really hard. But it was weird. The thought of even being pregnant had made Jisung sick to his stomach, and it still did but there was a hint of something, he wasn't sure what it was but he felt less lonely. It didn't kill his fear and uncertainty and Jisung felt confused when he was stuck between disgust and awe.

But it was wrong to him.

He started getting more attention from the doctors which he had hated, but he had also gained a new pass to go around the facility at any time he wished. Now that he carried the future, they were to give in to even his smallest desire.

On the fourth week, Jisung finally wanders out into the gardens, admiring the colours autumn had painted over the garden. And for the next few weeks, the gardens had become a safe place for him. He felt freer than he had in years breathing in the outside air.

He felt he was slowly going to terms with it and with each passing week, the small swell of his abdomen had caused a flurry of emotions inside of him. He didn't know what to think, really. So he had put his hand over his stomach gently and poked at it, swaying between the lines of both utter hatred and disgust and a strange tingle of awe.

The morning of the seventh week Jisung remembers waking up to an abdominal cramp rippling through him stronger than he had ever remembered them to feel. He had rolled out of his bed, his head pressed against the springy mattress as he cried into it, muffling his cries.

When it had passed, he lifted his head only to be met with the sight of red standing out against the stark white sheets. Jisung had stared in shock for a few seconds before the pain returned and this time, he allowed himself to scream.

Horror had filled him to the brim in that moment.

It had only settled hours later as he laid on the treatment bed, cocooned in blankets. He had felt relief fill him for a little bit and

then all that remained was absolute disgust at himself that he could even have the heart to be grateful for losing the pregnancy. Because Jisung had grown to feel things for the little flutter, his hand rested on his stomach throughout the day, his thumb pressing into the swelling of his abdomen, a skipping of his heart when he imagined life under his skin.

But he was relieved. Terribly so and he had tried so hard to convince himself that it was okay to feel such.

After all the thing he had never wanted to happen to him had come half true, he had fallen into the early stages, but somehow he was pulled out of it. Jisung felt sick that he was grateful.

He was eighteen now.

He had been given months to regulate his fertile cycles again before they were to try again. Jisung was now a zombie.

He simply breathed. There was nothing he could do to stop his fate now. After miscarrying it all felt so pointless. He couldn't possibly get out of it every time.

But this time it was different. It scared Jisung more and more he thought about it. He didn't sleep a wink at all. Instead, he held onto his abdomen and tried not to override himself into a panic.

They had put everything up as an option to why it hadn't stuck. The implantation being done the same day the harvest was done was another, but they hadn't started him on hormones which lead to Jisung thinking they were planning something different.

And when Jisung found out what these other plans, he had paled and back when he was in his room, he had thrown up.

The first implantation hadn't worked. And once he heard the news of the second implantation being done during his fertile week, he froze.

Jisung couldn't breathe at the thought.

He swore they were testing his limits. Their continuous conversation about the topic had heightened his anxiety for the events, and when the dates of the implantation would occur became known to him, Jisung had locked himself in his bathroom and he had expected himself to cry, but nothing came.

Staring at himself in the mirror, he had felt the creeping numbness return.

And since then, Jisung has felt nothing but a dull aching in his chest and the throbbing of an organ he never should have developed.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

AHHH so hi!! im going to be posting the first two chapters and then I'll be moving onto weekly uploads (Sunday) so one more chapter after this before the next updates are weekly :DDD please leave a comment if you're liking this so far! <3333

3. 2 →

Chan had seen the downfall start right before his eyes.

He was ten when it had started. Living in the outer part of the closed-in city had given him the freedom to go out into the slums during the day while his mother worked to support their family of two, and with that freedom, Chan had front row seats to humanity downfall.

Chan had made friends with a boy who lived just outside of the slums, Lee Minho, the son of the farmer whose produce was always topnotch and the highest quality. They had enough money to move from the area into a closed-off safer place but the boy's parents had refused. Chan didn't know why they didn't want to leave, but when he was playing in the yard just off from the fields of greens with Minho, Chan had realised why.

Kids, his age and younger swept in quite stealthily, Chan had almost missed them but when Minho froze to watch them, Chan had seen them, frowning.

Chan had asked why Minho didn't shoo them away, or even tell his father but all Minho had done was point to their bellies and Chan had noticed the obvious difference then.

Both their bellies were lucky to almost always be filled. They didn't know the deep pang of hunger that haunted the people of the lower slum.

His eyes narrowed down on a particularly small child, one that held onto the hand of a girl a few years older than him. He was tiny and the ratted clothes that he had on hung off him, threatening to tip off his shoulder when he made a movement. He carried as much as he possibly can with his small arms. His eyes hold dark circles underneath them, but his cheeks, puffy and chubby, the only part of his body that held onto excess fat.

“Dad says I’m lucky,” Minho told him a few seconds later the group of children disappear. “Some people don’t have enough food so we always plant extras!” The boy younger by a year had smiled widely. “It makes me happy to let them take the plants I sowed!”

Out of pure curiosity, Chan had made his way down the slums two days later after his mother left for work. The furthest he had ever been outside of the concrete wall was to the Lee’s farm which was located just outside the wall, stretching on and on to grow crops for the Capitals population.

The further he went, the more the colour palette had reduced, leaving the world around him coloured in with several shades of brown and grey.

People had stared at him, but no one dared to advance on the kid from the concrete walls. Chan felt a little uncomfortable under all their prying eyes but his curiosity was too strong to ignore and so he went on, falling deeper and deeper into the slums.

It was strange here. Inside the walls there were so many rules put in place, you weren’t allowed to do this or that, but here people sat close with each other, cuddling up with one another. People weren’t uncomfortable to show their affection for one another.

Chan craved that.

People sat and laughed with each other, not caring if their laughter carried in the wind, travelling loudly around. He saw so many smiles, a stark difference to the hard and emotionless faces he peered at inside the walls.

Families were tightly woven together, and though survival was their main goal, Chan saw true happiness.

Ten-year-old Chan had then begun to visit the slums regularly. Sometimes Minho would sneak out from the farm and come with him, playing around with the makeshift toys the children had made.

And for once, Chan had felt welcomed. The rules here were heavily enforced by the Capital, most things punishable by death, but there were fewer government officials down here which meant life was lived a little looser.

Months went by of Chan visiting.

Maybe Chan was just observant? Or perhaps he noticed the changes easier than the people who had spent their whole lives in the slums?

Nonetheless, Chan had noticed.

The sudden gaunt faces of some of the women and then mere days later, influxes of funeral songs and burials had shocked the then ten-year-old.

Chan had been startled by the nonchalant people that lived in the slums. It was like they had not noticed the sudden deaths that were becoming more frequent each passing day. It lasted for a few months until the presence of the disaster had grown too large for any one to miss.

They only noticed when the announcement came.

Chan watched from afar as sudden fear had come over their faces and he stood still in the stampede of people rushing back to their homes.

The little boy Chan had seen in Minho's fields was there and Chan watched as he was hurriedly picked up by his mother. His eyes were soft, holding confusion in them and Chan, at his young age had felt sorry for the little boy. The children that didn't understand would suffer, not realising why their mothers were dropping dead like flies.

The disease had spread in the city months before and even under the strict rules of the Capital.

It had taken just a few months after the first announcement of the disease that women were critically endangered. Chan lived with a pit of fear always coiling in the pit of his belly. He watched as his mother shrink from the pressure of not able to go to work anymore. The money they were given to the government was barely enough to feed them both and Chan sunk down into distress as he watched his

mother give up her own meal to just feed him.

Chan stayed home with his mother for quite some time. Inside their little home, Chan had watched his mother slowly go insane.

He tried his best to comfort her, but she had pushed him away and Chan was left alone in the house, his mother eventually locking herself up in her room.

Chan started going back to the slum.

He had been curious how they were dealing with it.

He was almost eleven, then. And he had stopped in the middle of the small market place where some goods were sold and traded where a crowd of men was forming. Chan didn't see a woman in sight.

He had stood frozen as the announcement filled his ears. Everyone was shocked and Chan had stared all around him then, realising the weight of this problem. If they were truly that desperate to begin trails for males to carry, Chan knew it was worse than he had originally thought.

Chan grew anxious each passing day.

Days then bled into each other and he and Minho had stopped playing childish games in the grassy patch. Instead, they sat together

and talked. They had matured too quickly for children their age.

Chan's mother became more and more distant and Chan had eventually found himself alone to fend for himself. That was until he turned twelve and she cracked.

Chan was surprised she lasted this long. He had felt it coming long before it had happened. She had come out again and there was something so terrifying about the smile she had forced onto her face. Her smile was believable, but it was her eyes that had made Chan feel so uneasy. Inside her warm brown eyes was a whirlwind of emotions.

His mother was a lively woman how thrived on being out and feeling helpful. When the disease broke out and women were urged to stay home, she still went out but once it had become too dangerous to even think about stepping outside, Chan had watched the light in her warm eyes fade.

The look in her eyes was frantic, full of panic and each passing day it grew until the smile she had perfected turned manic and Chan was left sheltering himself in the corner of his home, hiding in front of a fallen table.

Glass was shattered everywhere and the stench of blood filled the room so intensely that Chan was almost choking on the air. The screams she let out, pulling at anything in sight and tearing her way through their home had rendered Chan into a pit of silent blubbing tears, too scared to announce his presence to his mother.

It was only when she had tumbled into her room that Chan picked himself up and threw himself out of the broken window that she had smashed in her mania.

He ran as fast as he could, out of the concrete walls, past Minho's farm and instead of running into the slums as he had originally planned— he wasn't sure why he even wanted to go there in the first place— his legs took him away, straight into the wilderness.

He had scrambled over the fence, tears rolling down his cheeks and choked sobs leaving his mouth.

He had spent weeks out there.

The wild was so quiet. There was no one here except for the occasional animal, though most species had become rare and mostly extinct through the centuries. The cracking of the fire he had made comforted him and the silence around him was a hundred-degree turnaround from the recent events.

He had taught himself how to survive and only weeks later after the fear in his chest had died down did he show up at Minho's doorstep.

His mother had died two weeks before his return.

Chan had cried into Mrs Lee's chest, wishing his last memory of her was kind and warm like the embrace he received from Minho's mother.

Minho's parents had taken him in with approval from the government. Chan liked living with the Lee's. Minho taught him how to plough fields and sow seeds. Chan enjoyed feeling needed and it the farm gave him that.

The world was cruel, though. Too cruel to breathe most of the time. Minho had his time to comfort Chan. It was short, only weeks of him offering his slighter frames warmth until it was Chan's time to give him comfort back.

Mrs Lee falls ill five weeks after Chan's arrival in their home. And all it takes is two weeks for her to take her last breath.

Chan and Minho witness first hand the terror of the disease.

It started with bloating of her abdomen which had grown larger and larger. She lost strength, unable to even lift herself from her bed after four days. They watched in horror as the life drained from her body, her breathing shallow and wheezy.

Her bloodstream was poisoned and quickly after she had haemorrhaged, the bloat of her stomach easing and sucking the life from her.

It was too much for the boys and as soon as she had passed Chan had taken Minho into the wild with him, not one of them telling Mr Lee where they were going.

It had healed them in a way.

There was no deadly disease out there for them to watch kill half the population. All there was the overgrown forests taking over the world slowly, eating up what used to be peoples homes hundreds of years ago.

They survive with each other's help for months until they grow uneasy at the lack of news they got out in the wild. There was no way to contact people where they were and after four months of living out on their own whims, they trudge back to the farm.

Minho's father was a mess, spluttering over the two boys as soon as he saw them, bringing them both into a strong embrace. They apologise for what felt like hours, promising the fretting man to never go out unless they had told him prior.

Chan frequented the slums less and less, but every time he did he had seen the same boy that he saw in the fields. He had barely grown over the years and every time Chan saw him, he always seemed to be on an important mission. The boy barely played from Chan's observations.

He had grown up seeing him run around, eyebrows furrowed and his chubby cheeks puffed out further in concentration. He had been tempted to go up to him and offer him something, a game or perhaps a few crops but Chan had decided against it each time. The little boy looked too busy to pay anything much a mind.

Chan was thirteen when the announcement comes. In roarily loud

posters, coloured brightly and the text bold. Chan had been lucky enough to receive an education. Minho had received some too, less than Chan but he knew the basics of the written language and the counting system. Minho had stood by his side, gaping at the bold poster.

“What?” The twelve-year-old had muttered. Chan had turned to Minho a frown encasing his features, mirroring his younger friends expression. “I can’t tell whether it’s a good thing or not?” Chan whispered and Minho bit onto his lower lip and shrugged. “I don’t know?”

SAVE HUMANITY!

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HOPE OF HUMANITY!

Just weeks from Chan’s fourteenth birthday he spots the same boy being carried by his father. Chan watched them enter the gate and with a frown present on his face he had waited, not wanting to enter the capital but too curious for his own good.

The boy's father comes back without the boy, his hand nursing a full pouch and an anxious look glazed over his eyes.

Chan waited a little longer, waiting for the boy but after twenty minutes Chan ends up wandering in and he recalls clearly the screams from the boy and the rapids flowing from his dark eyes. Chan is felt frozen in his spot as he watched them shove a needle into

his body and he whimpered out when the boy fell, losing consciousness.

Chan stiffened and slowly backed away as they picked up his small body, taking him away.

He ran all the way back, an unsettled feeling tingling in his gut that has never once gone away.

There was something that had stirred inside of him from that point on. On his fourteenth birthday, Minho had asked him what he would've liked to do and Minho had been shocked at his request.

"Fight me," He had said. Minho had stared at him with wide eyes. "I don't know how to fight," he had countered back.

Chan had been adamant on learning how to fight and instead of trying to learn by busting his friend's butt he had started practising moves he thought could be useful since the books the capital allowed the libraries to hold were limited on knowledge, there was no use looking for a book on *fighting styles*.

He was filled with pent up anger that fuelled himself to fight harder. He thought about that day in particular a lot. The day when he watched the tiny boy go limp in strangers hold and the bag of money his father carried in his now empty arms.

It made anger soar inside of him every time he remembered that day and Chan often found himself thinking about the boy, wondering if he was okay and what they were doing to him. Chan hadn't dared to

tell anyone what he saw. He hadn't even told Minho. Not because he didn't trust him, but there was something about it that made Chan not dare talk about it. It was weird.

But Chan could only teach himself so much, but there was little to no way Chan could learn to fight any other way.

Until he met Changbin.

Changbin was small.

That was Chan's first impression of the boy, but it certainly changed once the younger boy had made him land flat on his ass in seconds.

“Woah,” Chan could only breathe out. “Teach me how to do that?”

Changbin becomes a close friend of Chan and Minho's. The boy, younger than Chan by two years is strangely good at fighting. He comes from an upper area of the slums, just outside the wall where a popular underground fighting ring is located.

Fighting rings are highly illegal and how it had slipped under the radar for so long had confused Chan.

Changbin's father was a judge inside the ring and if you'd ask Changbin about it he'd tell you fighting was something he's always known. Since he was young he had seen fights and picked up on

moves and fought other kids who frequented the ring.

Chan had blown not just himself away, but Changbin and Minho.

He had exceeded in his fights with the other two boys and only after a few lessons he could land Changbin back on his ass. The youngest was never happy about it, but he had been surprisingly supportive of Chan's natural ability to kick ass.

Minho was good too, he was quicker than the rest of them, nimble and able to defend himself which gave him the upper hand many times.

But Chan was a prodigy.

Changbin had taken him to meet with the men who regularly fought in the ring to show him off and to get their opinion on what to do next to allow him to grow even further.

Chan had been taken under the wing of a man named Jeongho. He was considered a big man in both the slums and the capital and Chan had to look up at him.

He was good at training Chan and Chan took home new skills and taught Minho and Changbin who eventually accepted that Chan was on a whole other level from him.

Chan enters the ring for the first time when he's sixteen.

He was one of the youngest to ever join an official match and it had created an uproar when he was matched with a man six years older than him.

Jeongho stood on the sidelines with Minho and Changbin and Chan remembers meeting their gaze, not one speck of worry in their eyes at all.

Chan had secured his place in the ring the ever first time he stood into it.

Not only had he broken a record for the fastest fight, but he also broke it as a young rookie. He had come out on top, undefeated for years. From a child determined to learn how to make a path in this cruel world, he had come far.

He had won countless fights, but every time he won there was one thing that remained. His friends by his side.

Chan really isn't sure how Hyunjin had made his way into their little trio. All that remembers is on one of his bigger fights when he was nineteen there was a boy who stared at him with wide eyes and a grin on his face.

"You know the vital points," Hyunjin had commented after he had won. Minho handed him a towel to wipe off his sweat while

Changbin passed him a canteen of water. Chan raised his eyebrows at the boy.

“Yeah,”

Hyunjin had shrugged. “Not many people know about basic anatomy these days,”

It was a strange introduction but Hyunjin had fit right into their trio which had grown by one.

Hyunjin wasn't around a lot though. He was a mystery for almost a year until he had worked up either the courage or hit his breaking point.

Chan still suspects heavily he had hit his breaking point, but Hyunjin had never given him a proper answer.

When he finally cracked it had opened up a wave of memories Chan hadn't settled inside himself properly.

Hyunjin spent most of his life in the capital, deep inside the walls. His family were well off, enough to class them as rich. Chan already had his speculations about the way Hyunjin was dressed and how shocked he had been during the first time he followed Chan into the slums.

His extensive knowledge about the body had suddenly made sense.

His father was a doctor, a highly prestigious one and Hyunjin was to become the second-best after him. Hyunjin was passionate about being a doctor but when he had explained the situation the medical knowledge was being used in Chan had tensed up like he had just been given the task to fight a boulder.

The humanity project as they called it.

Hyunjin first hand had witnessed everything done to the boys.

Chan had felt sick and judging by the looks on his other friends' faces, they were just as shocked and appalled.

The boys that were being made to carry the future— literally— was a secret, not one person outside of the tight science facility had known details about.

But Hyunjin had sat in front of them and looked on the verge of tears.

He hadn't seen too much only following his father on certain days but he knew a lot and what he did know had left the friend group fuming.

Chan remembers looking down at the boy and asking what he meant

by consent wasn't ever given out to a particular boy. Hyunjin knew his name but he refused to tell them who it was after explaining that he just knew the other boy wouldn't appreciate being spoken about.

Hyunjin tells them about the crying and whimpers of pain that never seem to cease.

Chan wants nothing more than to tear down the doors and let them out. But he can't, Hyunjin had continued rambling and the more he went on did Chan realise to the possibility of ever ripping them out was close to zero.

But it was *close* to zero.

Chan's breaking moment had come when he was nineteen.

The ring had been outed or found by authorities and Minho had held him back from afar as everyone who had been in the ring at the time of the discovery was murdered in plain sight.

The militaries walkers, the armoured men that wandered around the streets with guns slung over their bodies, ready to shoot anyone caught doing anything illegal had grown in size. And Chan watched in horror as they pointed their white guns at the people he knew, his teachers and his friends, shooting them dead.

Chan was blind.

He had been too invested in fighting and getting better that certain things had blown over his head, only remembering it at that moment.

No one could talk with living in fear these days. People were starving, almost no women existed anymore yet people were being blindly murdered with absolutely no remorse.

Chan sees corruption clearly now. Living anywhere the government touched was a curse. Politics was a strain of dark magic and Chan wanted nothing more than to run and drown out the dark magic with pure light magic.

He wasn't a fucking mage, though.

But there was one thing he *could* do.

Minho's a genius to put it short.

Chan was baffled by him when he had brought back an old and broken television from the capital that really wasn't anything more than a relic and Minho had plonked himself in front of the piece of junk and when Chan asked about it days later, he had excitedly pulled him by the hand and revealed a working television on his bedroom floor.

“How did you do that?” Chan asked, baffled. Minho had shrugged. “I pulled it apart and put it back together. Remember that time the tractor had broken down and Dad had to call the mechanics?”

Chan nodded. “And you watched them the whole time!” He recalled suddenly.

“You remember all that?” Chan gaped at him and Minho nodded. “We all have different strengths,”

He was right and quickly it became clear what everyone's strengths were.

Chan was a force to reckon with, defined muscles developed from his time in the ring and keeping up with the demand of getting better at fighting. He was the most level headed out of their little quartet, always breaking up the quarrels Changbin and Minho would find themselves in. He was their comfort, their home and Chan would do anything to keep it that way.

Minho had proved himself to be a genius. Seeing something done only once, he could perfect it in just a matter of seconds. He was quick and nimble, able to fight off danger and fight back if needed. Although he was hot-headed, almost exploding at something at least thrice a day, he had proved himself to become a big part of the plan stirring in Chan's head.

Changbin was a master at slithering around in the shadows. He blended in with the dark and Chan had lost count of the number of times he had been startled by the younger. Changbin knew how to

get things down quickly and thoroughly. Living in the slums had given him an understanding of how cruel the world could be and he knew how to survive in it.

And Hyunjin was the last puzzle piece to fit into his lacking plan.

He knew his way around the facility, inside and outside and that was the last thing Chan needed before the plan he had formulated in his mind had become fool-proof.

It was risky, incredibly so but Chan has had enough.

Chan had told his plan to his three friends as soon as it felt smooth enough in his mind. Instead of any of them rejecting they had added bits to make it even more possible to complete.

Hyunjin had been the one most wary. He knew the facility better than the imaginations his friends perceived it as. But Hyunjin couldn't say no.

The things he saw, the things he did with his father were concentered in his mind and all he could see when he was on the edge of backing down was the pair of eyes at stared mercilessly into his soul, the life-sucking out of them in mere seconds.

Hyunjin brought back a map of the facility and they spent months revising it, mapping out the floor plan in their heads until they swore they could see it when they closed their eyes.

Chan had taken Minhø to the landfill just outside the slums, searching around with him for things that Minhø had deemed both useful and fixable. They brought them back to the farmhouse, where Changbin was waiting for them, he too moving in with the farming family when his father had been killed in the ring's raid. They sat there for hours, opening up the broken things for Minhø while he replaced broken parts and rewired certain parts.

Late into that night, they had a full collection of inner earpieces that Minhø tinkered to fit with the small walkie talkies that clipped onto the collars of their shirts, looking like a questionably placed button instead of a chunky device. Minhø found hadn't been able to find tracking devices and Chan knew the government wasn't dumb enough to throw out their more valuable devices, no matter how broken they were. The threat of people like Minhø were enough for them to keep firearms and most devices out of the landfills.

Changbin had snuck into the capital with Hyunjin by his side who had taken him close enough to the facility so he could clearly see the buildings, but far away enough for it to be disguised as an innocent walk.

From there, Changbin had polished off the route they could take to reach the facility.

The building was far away from housing estates or any other buildings for that matter. It was surrounded in its own concrete wall, and an electric fence that was on 24/7, but Changbin had an eye for detail and had found a weak point that would let them in if the electric fence could be turned off.

Hyunjin returns to the farmhouse two days before the planned date of the mission, on his back a bag that contains a single uniform.

“I tried to find a size that would fit you nicely,” he says, throwing the clothes to Chan who catches them. “We want you to blend in as best as possible.”

It was Hyunjin’s contribution to the plan that had finally made the plan strong enough to execute.

He had smuggled out a nurses uniform for Chan, needing more than one person to help him out before they could let the other two in. Chan had been wary at first because Hyunjin had spoken about face identifying technologies before, but he had assured him that it turned off when the facility was unable to be the prime consumer of the Capital's energy.

The day that had planned to finally break-in was during the Capital’s festival. A time where the Capital put on performances inside the grand hall, showing off their wealth and enforcing laws. There were dances, spectacular coloured lights burning brightly across the capital, taking up the power needed for the more power-draining aspects the facility had. It was aired across the towns, and on the large screens built onto the sides of buildings, allowing the slums access to the night that is filled with art, but merciless and horrid acts.

It was perfect timing.

“Thanks,” Chan gives Hyunjin a small smile, although it doesn’t quite

reach his eyes. Hyunjin gives him a tight lipped smile in return.

“How is everyone feeling?” Chan asks, breathing out heavily as he neatly places the clothing down.

“Nervous, but what’s new?” Hyunjin mutters, fiddling with his fingers.

“Yeah,” Minho breathes out. “I don’t think we’re meant to be jumping with excitement over this,”

“Well,” Changbin cuts in. “I know we’re all *excited* about this, it’s just a really intimidating situation,” there are hums of agreements echoing around the room then.

“And no one wants to back out?” Chan asks softly. He really hopes no one will, and he’s sure they won’t but if someone were to back out, Chan wouldn’t dare to question them twice. If this didn’t work out it would be a death mission.

Minho scoffs. “As if we would. We want to do this just as much as you do,”

Chan’s tensed muscles relax then and he lets himself smiling, draping his arms over Minho and Changbin, tugging them close to his sides. “Come here, you,” he gestures to Hyunjin who grins.

His long arms curl around Changbin and Minho’s shoulders, leaning

his face in the crook of Chan's neck.

"We can do this," Chan tells them in a gentle mutter.

"Of course," Changbin agrees straight away.

"If everyone does their part we'll get out with enough time to run away," Minho muses with a slight chuckle.

They pull away from the hug and Chan pats his friend on his head, dragging brown locks out of his eyes. "Have you told your father yet?" Minho hums.

"He knows,"

Mr Lee had been let in on the plan since the beginning, but only recently he had been let in on the date and the coincidences that would follow quickly after the rescue.

"Then I guess all we can do then is sleep until it's time," Chan concludes. There's a flutter of anxiousness rising in his chest but Chan forces it back down.

They will save them, Chan will make sure of it and as they run away together, they will leave the world in chaos, their future far from their hands and vanishing into thin air.

Chan can't wait.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

okay! next updates are weekly from now on!! thanks
so much!!

4. 3 →

Jisung lays in the bed, staring up at the white ceiling. The mattress is uncomfortable underneath his body, springy and hard but Jisung stays there, lying still.

Implantation day had gone by, passed and Jisung felt heavy.

All Jisung could do now was wait for the testing day, another day that will seal his unforgiving fate.

If it does turn out positive, Jisung can't help but hope that it fails just like it did last time. Maybe eventually they will give up on him, classify him as infertile even though he had gone through the years of modification. The feeling of hope that lingers inside of him makes him sick to his stomach that he even had wished to go through that pain again.

But it stays, persistent and stubborn and eventually, Jisung doesn't even try to forcibly remove it, he lets it stay, festering into a bigger feeling until it becomes a gaping wound in the side of his heart.

The dim light that's flowing through the clouded window fills the dull room with flickers of colours, something Jisung didn't have the privileged to see much. But instead of trying to peer out of the frosted glass window, Jisung lays still, hands clasped over his stomach and his eyes watching the colours reflect on the white ceiling.

His stomach is growling at him, begging for food but Jisung will not

give in.

He knows the pang of hunger too well for it to affect him like the other privileged people who had access to food at all times.

Jisung was used to going days, weeks at a time without filling his belly and the deep rumble he feels only reminds him of the beginning of his life, back in the slums where it was simple. Jisung only had to survive, feed himself, but now his life is filled with uncertainty if he's going to make it out the same person.

Jisung has changed too much already, though.

A deep sigh leaves his lips.

The facility was quiet than what it usually was, most workers out at the Capital's Festival, watching or participating. It was eerie in a way. Jisung was so used to noise here. There was always something going on, but now there was nothing but the distant noise of the festival, a blur of faint noise and the noise of the dripping iv stuck in his hand.

They couldn't force him to eat, forcing food down his throat was a big risk of choking and they were doing anything in their power to keep these boys safe and alive. But they could give him nutrients through the drip and Jisung felt too tired to even fight against their will.

Jisung knows there are other boys who have been staying in the

facility for quite some time now. Jisung guesses they were going through the last step before a harvest. Jisung has seen several of them around the gardens when he wanders out and his heart had felt both heavy and hot in his chest.

They were all young, every single boy around his age. Their eyes were bright, still full of life and Jisung can't help his jealousy for that. His youth had been snatched away from him right in front of his eyes, leaving him with dull eyes, hollowed out and a shell that protected him from the peering eyes.

They had looked at him and some had smiled, trying to advance to him, but Jisung would glare back and walk away before they could even get close to him. Jisung wasn't going to let anyone in, no matter if they were in the same situation as him or not.

He wasn't prepared to lose something else.

Jisung sniffs out and rolls onto his side, hugging the spare pillow he had taken from the treatment room when he was taken in for the implantation.

Jisung blinks when the only light in his room, coming from his iv stand suddenly goes out. His eyes take a few seconds to adjust to the new light, only coming in from his window in bright greens and blues.

He sighs louder this time and props himself up on his elbow and that's when a loud screeching noise of metal fills his ears. He hisses and covers his ears that have grown sensitive from the lack of noise.

He shuffles up, pulling his only blanket up with him, covering his lower body. Footsteps are thumping down the hall, heavy and loud and Jisung freezes for a second.

There's hardly ever any commotion in the facility, it was a place enforced with strict rules and cruel punishments. Jisung could only think of this as something terrible. He's heard stories of war and ruin, stories that tell of captured victims, murder.

So when his door flies open, Jisung flings himself towards the intruder. His balled-up fist is caught in their grasp and Jisung grunts out, trying to kick them but he's too fast and blocks him again.

"Hey!" They grunt out as they grip Jisung's arm harshly. "I'm not here to hurt you!" He lets go of his grip on Jisung's arm and Jisung takes two seconds to see his escape and he takes it, gripping onto his iv, he kicks his intruder where the sun doesn't shine and when he doubles over in pain, he bolts past the unsuspecting man right out of his room and into the hall.

He takes five steps before he's being caught around his arm again, pulling him back. He yelps out and struggles in the mans stronger grip.

"Hey, hey we're not here to hurt you! I promise! We're here to get you out!"

Jisung stiffens and turns, meeting the man's eyes for the first time.

He's almost a head taller than him, but it was easy to be taller than him. He was the shortest boy in the facility, everyone else taller than him. His round eyes are a deep brown, but strangely distant. "What do you mean?" His own eyes are wide.

"We're getting you out of here," he repeats again and Jisung stares. "I don't know you," He can only say.

"I don't have to know you to save you from this all," He gestures with his free hand. Jisung narrows his eyes at him. "I don't trust you,"

"You don't have to, but if you don't hurry up, we're going to be off schedule and we'll get caught!" He throws something at Jisung from his backpack and hurries him into his room again. "Change into this, quickly!"

Jisung has two options right now. He can either listen to the man who he's not entirely sure if he can trust, or he can lock himself up and allow himself to miss this opportunity and live his life out like the government wants him to.

Jisung scoffs.

"Fuck the government,"

The shirt is around three times too large and the pants barely stay on, its only purchase on his fuller hips but surprisingly the boots the man had given to him after he was dressed in the dark clothing fit pretty well with enough room to spare for it to be comfortable, not threatening to fall off his feet.

“Good,” the man says and tugs on his hand, beginning to pull him out of the room. “Wait!” Jisung calls out, suddenly remembering the implant he had received when he was fifteen.

The pants he was given had rips and worn out patches through the legs and when Jisung tugs up the too loose pant leg, a gap appears by his thigh and with his other hand, he rips his iv from the back of his hand, only a small hiss escaping him as he yanks the needle out.

The man he’s with groans out as Jisung shoves the needle into his thigh, digging it into his flesh. Jisung holds back his scream as it cuts in deep enough for him to finally feel the metal device. He pulls the needle out, throwing it to the ground and he grits his teeth, hissing when he pulls out the metal square from his body.

“Okay,” Jisung says as he stands back up again, throwing the bloodied tracker into the pile of white clothes on his floor. “I can go now,” the man only nods, obviously shocked at what Jisung had just done.

The man starts running and Jisung follows him, trying to keep up with his longer and faster legs. They loop around where Jisung had

spent seven tortuous years of his life and into the gardens where to Jisung's surprise six other people are climbing over the electric fence he had once tried to climb when he was fifteen.

“Is that you all?” Another voice comes out. Jisung looks around to see three other familiar faces and he nods. There was only four of them that had become stuck in the facility. Someone else answers him vocally, but Jisung doesn't know their name. He doesn't know anyone's name except his own.

The man that had come and got Jisung from his room jumps up onto the fence and begins climbing. Jisung blanks. It was obvious that one of them had shut the power off from the facility so it was possible to climb the large fence.

Jisung is weary when he puts his foot into the first groove in the weaved metal, but when he realises it not only holds his weight and that his arms can support himself as he climbs, he scurries up the tall fence as fast as possible.

He scampers away from the fence as soon as he gets to the other side. “Changbin!” The man with the most muscle calls out and a man Jisung's height gives him a thumbs up and a short whistle. “All here let's get moving!”

Jisung feels like he's going to start shaking like a leaf, he's a mix of emotions. Anxiousness wants to swallow him whole, but he's finally free from his stark white life.

Jisung looks around for a few heartbeats and feels his heart soar.

Free.

→

“Does everyone remember the plan?” Asks Chan, his voice steady and loud.

Groans erupt from all around the room. “You’ve asked us like seventeen times already! I swear!” Hyunjin cries out from where he’s shoving things into a backpack. “Everyone knows what to do, Chan, it’s fine,” Minho assures him for seems like the nth time.

Chan let’s put a deep sigh and nods his head. “I’m just on edge,”

“We all are,” Changbin puts in. “Terrified,” Hyunjin adds.

“Great,” Chan sticks both of his thumbs up and smiles wearily.

“We’ve gone over this plan way too much for anything to fall through,” Chan speaks up as he bundles more supplies into bags. “We’ll be fine.” His friends grin at him and Minho hums, sticking his

thumbs up back at chan.

“But do we have everything?”

Chan laughs when his friends groan out again.

When the sun sets and in the television that Minho had fixed sparks to live, airing the Festival on the screen, brightly coloured light filling the room, they grow even more antsy, knowing that they'll be executing their plan not even half an hour later.

They have a final meal with Minho's father who tearfully says goodbye to his son and his friends and after their bellies are full and their eyes are wet from tears, they set off.

Changbin and Hyunjin lead the way, both boys knowing the route the best. They go through the wild first, going around the concrete wall until they make it to the unguarded post, abandoned after the building had collapsed due to poor architectural design. However, there still remained security cameras and movement detectors all around the wall.

Minho throws both bags that hung off his back to Hyunjin and he quickly digs out his pocketknife he received on his thirteenth birthday from his father and unwires them out of sight, thanks to Changbin who had sussed out the blind spots months prior.

Changbin, the only one that could scale the ten-foot wall scampers up in one swift movement. “Good job!” Chan praises in a whisper and gets a glare from Minho in return for talking.

The six backpacks get thrown over first, Changbin catching each one and moving them to a different section of the unguarded wall to protect the valuable things they’re going to need in the near future.

The other three could get close to scaling the ten-foot wall, so it makes Changbin’s job of grabbing them and helping them up much easier.

It takes an hour and forty minutes of them walking the route to finally even see the facility.

“You better change soon,” Hyunjin tells Chan as they slip out of another alleyway. “I can do it here,” Chan murmurs and the boys agree.

“It fits well,” Hyunjin comments as he reaches out to fix the pocket at the front. “Last stretch of this part,” Chan smiles at the other three. “How’s everyone feeling, quick check-in,”

He receives thumbs ups from all the other boys and he shuffles his two backpacks off his back and gives them to Minho and Changbin. Hyunjin follows suit and passes off his one, leaving the two with three bags each.

Minho presses the inner earpiece situated in his ear and leans down to his collar and speaks, "Is it working?"

"Yeah," comes Changbin's voice through the pieces. They all test out their own and Chan and Hyunjin only set off to the facilities entrance once they're all deemed fully functioning.

"Are you sure this part is going to go smoothly?" Chan asks, his nerves fully him at full force as they near the entrance. "It will," Hyunjin says with confidence. That makes Chan feel a little bit more at ease. "Besides, if not you get to knock out a few extra people," Hyunjin sings, hopeful that he'll get to see chan in action more.

"Great!" chan replies sarcastically.

The gates to the facility open as soon as Hyunjin scans the keycard around his neck and Chan feels jitters flow through his body.

"In the first gate," Chan sends the message through the earpieces. "I'm nervous," Hyunjin sings as they walk up to the facility's large doors.

The building is stark white and it pops out against the concrete wall behind it. It kind of hurts Chan's eyes to even look at it.

Chan slips his hand into Hyunjin's just steps before the door and

squeezes it reassuringly. The younger boy turns back and smiles gently. Then, he lets go of the eldest's hand and steps forward, slipping his card and the doors click open, slowly widening in front of them.

"Welcome, Hwang Hyunjin, 178, please proceed in discretion." A robot voice fills their ears and after they step in, Hyunjin snorts a bit.

"In the facility, start proceeding to the wall," Chan whispers to his collar.

The facility is just as bright in the inside, worse possibly due to the light in the facility. It's so bright that at first, Chan has to squint. Maybe this was a security measure, too?

The only person they come in contact with straight away is the receptionist sitting at a desk.

"Hello, Doctor Hwang," They bow in Hyunjin's direction and the boy bows slightly back.

Chan's heart soars when their eyes lock onto him and they point a finger at him. "You," they say and Chan points to himself like an idiot. He's gestured to come closer and he does, proceeding with caution.

"Jisung is causing problems again, you're going to have to prepare another drip bag soon," they say quickly. "Make sure you give him

the modified solution,”

“Of course,” Chan finds himself saying and then he’s finally walking away after what felt minutes of standing off against an enemy.

But then he turns, having to complete their plan to the last tiny detail. “Actually,” he says with a small smile. “What about this?”

His body flies over the desk and in one swift movement, too fast for the man to even yell out in surprise, he’s knocked unconscious.

“Ohhh! Chan, you’re so good,” Hyunjin sticks his thumbs up at the eldest of their little group and smiles. “Right,” Chan brushes himself off.

“We need to get to the control room straight away,” Chan then says, cracking his knuckles.

“Right this way,” Hyunjin says gesturing to a hallway. “You’re ready to kick some ass?” Chan snorts at this. “When am I never?”

“Hey boys!” Hyunjin cheers as the door to the control room is kicked down by his long legs. “It was so nice knowing you all! I hope you don’t lose your jobs after this!”

Chan flies in, elbows shoving into pressure points that knock the men unconscious as soon as he gets near them. Someone tries to put up a fight against him and Hyunjin takes the time to actually watch this one. Although there's not much of a show, Chan is too quick and one swift action to the man's neck leaves him sinking to the ground.

"Nice!" Hyunjin cheers as soon as all twenty men of the control room are completely knocked out of it. "Minho, we've done it! Now, what do we do?"

"Okay, cool! Hyunjin showed me a picture a few weeks ago, there should be a button on the main control panel, very easy to spot, it's the only suspicious red button," Minho's voice flows through their right ears steady and clear. He had really done a great job at repairing the broken devices.

"I'm gonna get moving to the boys, have you got this down?" Hyunjin gives him a nod. Chan changes back into the clothes he had on prior to the nurses clothing and leaves after making sure Hyunjin is fine.

Even after studying the layout of the facility, it was harder to navigate than Chan had originally thought. Everything looked so similar, white, plain and headache-inducing.

Only after being gone from the control room for five minutes, he finds the quarters where he knows three boys are staying. There were only four boys in total being locked up in the facility that Hyunjin knew of and that was their only targets to save.

There's a name on the door that he opens, his eyes scanning the letters carefully.

Felix.

When the door opens there's a boy peering up at him from a small bed.

"Hi," Chan greets softly. The boy looks surprised to see him. "I know this is really unexpected but we're here to get you out of here," then the lights are shut off, the power leaving the building.

"Good! Changbin is at the wall I'm going to get the other boy!" Minho's voice comes through the device.

The boy on the bed flinches when the lights flicker off.

"Out of here?" The boy asks back in a much deeper voice than Chan had possibly imagined to come out of the fairy-like boy's mouth.

"Breaking out. Free," Chan puts shortly. Felix tilts his head, the words registering through his head. When it does, his eyes light up and he looks at Chan, shocked.

"Out of here?"

“Yeah! Come on, we’re on a tight time limit here. Do you want to get out or not?”

“Of course!” Felix jumps up and follows Chan down the hall. “We have to get the others!” Felix points to the rooms ahead and Chan nods.

With Felix already convinced on getting out of the facility, it’s easy work to get the other two boys in this certain wing of the facility.

The boy with fox-like eyes lets out a hurried jumble of words as they’re running to the facility’s garden, “What about Jisung?” It comes out as a blur of words, but Chan understands it much to his surprise.

Chan remembers the name that the nurse had uttered. Hyunjin hadn’t told them specifically their names just yet, but it wasn’t needed since they had the layout and rooms where the boys were memorised.

“The boy in the other wing! We sent Minho to him instead, he’s the least nice out of all of us!”

Hyunjin had recommended that Minho was to go to the East Wing, to the only boy that resided there. He had spoken of a boy that was cold and stubborn and he had said the rest of them were all too soft to deal with the boy.

And Hyunjin knew Minho wouldn’t be the one to get his emotions the

best of him to a stranger at best.

Chan watches as Jisung climbs the fence.

Chan knows it will be a rough trot from here on out, but he will do anything to make sure everyone kept safe and sound.

→

Jisung stares up at Changbin who scales the concrete wall ease.

He catches the bags that the other boys throw up to him and carefully place them on top of the wall a little more than a meter from where he's perched on top of the high wall.

Jisung takes a step back when he sees the first boy, the tallest of them—he hasn't seen his face yet, it being too dark and too occupied from running—takes a running start and makes it more than halfway by himself, but the smaller man grabs his hand and helps him up the wall.

“Come on!” Someone hisses at him.

He watches as the boys he vaguely remembers climb, just less than halfway, but enough for them to be caught nonetheless.

And soon Jisung is the only one left at the bottom, the opposite side of the large wall.

“Come on!” The voice comes again and Jisung looks up to see Changbin gesturing to him. “Jump!”

Jisung tries.

But he’s been locked away for seven years, the only exercise he’s done is the pacing in his room and the occasional walks around the gardens.

Jisung is no by means fit. Not at all.

He can only try to reach up for the other boy's hand, but he’s too far away.

“I can’t!” He cries, suddenly stunned by a wave of panic.

Changbin tries to reach down but he grunts. “You’re too small!” Jisung has the nerve to glare at Changbin after he yells at him. “Says you!” He grits back. Changbin scoffs loudly. “I don’t like this one,

maybe we should leave him here!”

Panic soars through the small boy and this time he lets out a frustrated yell.

“Hyunjin, go down you’re the tallest one,” the voice is much calmer and it makes Jisung feel a little comforted, but it still sends a flash of uneasiness down his spine. Because of that *name*. Jisung has heard that name before.

Jisung pivots out of the way when the tallest slides down the wall, landing surprisingly gracefully at Jisung's feet.

He yelps when hands enclose around his waist. “Don’t—“ he begins to scream at the boy grabbing him, but he’s then being thrust upwards and he scrambles to find purchase on the boy's shoulders.

“Oh my god did they even feed you in there!?” The boy holding him, Hyunjin cries out. Jisung grits his teeth together as he grasps onto Changbin's hand he tries to open his mouth again, but instead, he lets out yet another cry when Changbin yanks him up the wall, harsh and not caring if he pops his shoulder out of his socket.

“How do I get down?” Jisung inquires out in a shaky tone. The drop looks much higher here, the ground sinking lower than what it did on the other side. Hyunjin is beside him in a few seconds and without hesitation, he jumps, landing safely on the other side.

“Just jump!” Someone calls to him. “I’ll catch you instead!” He follows the voice and his eyes land on a figure with muscled arms stretched out. Jisung feels a shiver run through him.

“Come on! We don’t have that much time!”

Jisung looks back at the white building that has housed his worries and greatest fears for seven years.

He was the future of this world. He and the three boys on the other side of the wall looking up at him where the last hope of fixing this horrid mess they had let go out of control.

Jisung is the last hope this world had, the tiny cell implanted in him was humanities ever fading future.

And here, upon the concrete wall he had stared at for seven years, wishing to break right through the wall, he finally has a choice. Something he has not had his whole life.

Jisung makes a choice.

Humanity will fall, and it will fall at his feet.

He leaps off the wall, into the awaiting arms of the man who promised to catch him and this time, Jisung can't help but let out a laugh.

The world will turn into shambles now. The boys that were the start of their new humanity are gone, their only test subjects disappeared. Millions of dollars wasted on each boy.

Jisung can taste destruction on the tip of his tongue, and he's never tasted something so delicious in his life.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

I KNOW I SAID SUNDAY Updates but ive written up to chapter 12 and i just cannot help myself when i have chapters ready to post so its a blessing in disguise lol

i really love reading ur comments!! U guys make my day thank u so much!!!

Twt @sungiesprouts

5. 4 →

Notes for the Chapter:

twt: @sungiesprouts come say hi!!!

Blood pounds throughout his body as his feet land harshly on the ground underneath him. His feet are throbbing, feeling battered and bruised each time he puts his foot firmly down on the earth, but Jisung will not stop.

There's a strange feeling in his heart, twirling with newfound freedom, excited but there's so much fear that Jisung thinks that might be the thing to pull him back under, the positive feelings of breaking out drowning in the negative like he's used to.

But every time the pain spirals up into his calves, he breathes out a new breath of relief.

Breathing in the cold air into his lungs, in his peripheral vision he can see the bodies of the others running with him.

He had forgotten all sense of time in this moment, but when the softest shades of pink and orange begin to illuminate the sky, four of them stop and suddenly run in a different direction and the other boys can only follow them mindlessly.

Jisung had stopped recognising their surroundings ages ago. He had only ever gone far enough into the wilderness to find food, always able to come out with just a half hours walk, but this has taken hours of running.

When the dense forest finally comes into his vision just as the sun is peeking up from the horizon does Jisung relax a bit.

The forests around the world were let alone for centuries, nature taking back over her original masterpiece and filling it with even more with time.

As far as Jisung knew, there was no need for men to be trained in tracking these days, machines had taken that over, but one on in this

period of time was brave enough to even step foot into the forests and the other wonderlands mother nature has created.

They would be safe from the Capital here. Not for long, but for some time. But they wouldn't be safe from the danger that lingered inside these overgrown safe-havens.

Exhaustion mauls at Jisung bones, his head starts to feel too heavy to hold up and the pounding feeling in his feet feels like it has travelled to all around his body, causing an onset crash.

"Hey," his lungs are burning at the extra power it takes to get words out. His voice is loud enough though, and when he skids to a halt, his hands on his knees as he desperately tries to catch his breath, the others stop with him, most of them copying his pose and breathing heavily.

"How much further until we can rest?" Jisung had been the only one to not receive a backpack when he jumped off the wall, and he was glad he didn't now because the exhaustion that is beginning to weight down in his bones, coming on quicker and quicker now that he's stopped is proving to be overwhelming. The bags look heavy and Jisung briefly wonders how far he could've gotten if he had one of them to haul around with him too.

"We need to be at least deep enough so it's almost impossible to find us," Comes a puffed out voice. It belongs to the man that had come up to his room to retrieve him.

"Can we walk for a bit instead?" Jisung suggests. He then looks around the group as the man who caught him as he jumped off the wall nods his head at the suggestion.

Everyone looks tired and their cheeks are red, and Jisung is sure the drumming of their heartbeats are just as loud as his own, booming and deafening in his ears.

And then he freezes, tensing in his spot and his heartbeat seems to miss a beat, finally giving his ears a break from the pounding. But then it returns, faster than before and a sudden chill runs through

him, turning his blood to ice in his veins, frozen in fear
He too meets his gaze, but instead of freezing he swallows the lump forming in his throat and his eyes dart around nervously until they finally settle back on him.

“You,” His voice is shaky and low, carried through the air in a trembling whisper.

When he finally regains movement of his body, his blood suddenly turns to red hot rage in his veins, burning him from the inside out and the sudden change of temperature causes it to curdle and burn hotter.

His body acts on its own, his mind running too fast for him to single out anything. When he lunges at the tall boy, his hands circling around his neck, everything happens too fast for Jisung to comprehend.

Eyes full of fear, pity and guilt stare back at him and almost as fast as they had come into Jisung's direct line of vision there's a force pushing him back and then he's flying, the only thing cradling his body the sharp chill early morning air.

His body collides with a tree's broad trunk, that knocks the air out of his lungs and the heat raging through his veins seeps out, leaving him with nothing but the pounding pain of his back hitting the tree and the dull throbbing of the deep cut on his thigh.

When Jisung opens his eyes the first thing he sees is the face of the man who had scaled the wall with ease, but his features are marred with anger and his eyes are unforgiving, sharp and unmoving.

Jisung feels unease tingle in his gut. The gaze is unhinging and Jisung does feel intimidated by it, but he finds the will to stare back after his moment of uncertainty.

“Are you insane!” He yells out at him and when he starts storming towards him, his boots digging into the plush soil and lifting up onto the tip of his boots, his back jacket blows behind him and the thumping of his footsteps echo throughout the earth, drumming up into Jisung's spine.

Jisung doesn't really know what's overcome him.

His body goes rigid and he thinks just before his mind goes blank that if this had happened in the facility, with a doctor and not this man with thick muscled arms, he would've fought back, stood strong.

But Jisung falters and with large eyes he pushes himself further into the tree, so hard that his spine digs into the rough bark and scratches his skin through his shirt, leaving a burning sensation.

The collar of his shirt is gripped harshly and his body follows with it until he's standing eye to eye with the furious man.

Jisung can't move.

He's screaming at himself to even lift a finger, but the only movement he seems capable of is the sudden tremor that flows through his body like shockwaves of electricity.

"Changbin!" A voice calls out. It sounds distant to Jisung, but that might just be because his heartbeat is drowning out all the other noises around him.

"Let him go!"

And then his grip on him disappears and Jisung gains control once more and scrambles back, falling onto his butt, his palms pressed into the damp earth behind him.

Changbin stares down at him. "You," He growls under his breath. "I really don't like you," and then he turns and runs to the boy that had started Jisung's inner turmoil from bubbling over.

Jisung stares at their figures with their backs to him and tears his eyes away as he feels the hot pool of anger twinge in his stomach again.

"Hey..." The voice is soft, almost hesitant but Jisung looks up at the person trying to catch his attention. The boy is around his age, freckles dusted over his cheeks and his eyes sparkling under the limited light of the rising sun. His hair is blonde shines ever so lightly in the dull light.

His hand is outstretched, a small gesture that makes the heat pooling in his chest a little more bearable. Jisung accepts it and is pulled back to his two feet by the blonde boy.

“Did you know of him before?” He seems concerned and Jisung thinks he has every right to be.

After all its not every day you get busted out of your prison by a group of boys that you’ve never seen in your life. Jisung can only guess he’s not only concerned for his wellbeing— which honestly makes Jisung’s conflicting emotions arise again. He doesn’t want to be looked down on, but the thought that someone actually cares enough for him to even think about his feelings makes him happier than he’s willing to admit— but for his own too. Perhaps he thought Jisung had a run-in with him and he had turned out to be a criminal or some sort.

But that means that this boy that had been in the same facility as him had never had the embarrassment and shame of being observed and destroyed under his gaze.

“I never knew him,” Jisung answers shortly. “But his face is too familiar for comfort,”

The boy bites onto his bottom lip. “Oh,” he whispers. “He worked in the facility?”

Jisung raises his eyebrows at the boy. “Yeah. You never saw him?” He shakes his head gently. His hand gently pats on Jisung’s sleeve.

“My name is Felix, by the way,” He whispers out and a tiny smile appears on his soft lips. Jisung presses his own into a thin line. “Jisung,” he says before walking off to join the already moving group ahead of them.

“Aren’t you hesitant?” Felix asks as he falls into step with him. They’re about twenty paces behind the others, but Jisung doesn’t feel particularly giddy to join up with them any time soon.

“Of course I am,” Jisung scoffs. Then he turns his head to Felix who peers at him with slightly enlarged eyes. “But I think this is better

than being imprisoned in that place for the rest of my life, what do you think?"

"Are you always so crude?" Felix asks, genuinely curious. Jisung can only chuckle at the boy.

"Isn't that what happens when you have limited contact for seven years?"

Felix's jaw drops and his eyes grow wider. The sun is shining brighter now, turning the sky orange around them and Felix's eyes sparkle in the orange light.

"Seven years?" He gapes. "That's a long time!" Jisung frowns. "You didn't spend that long there?"

Jisung would be lying if he said he wasn't mad at the confession. It just didn't seem fair to him at all. He hadn't suffered the Hwang boy peering at him over his stupid clipboard that contained notes of his 'personal devolvment' and the gnarling pain for seven whole years.

"No," Felix whispers with a shake of his head. "I entered at twelve—" A whole year older than Jisung had been at the time. "But they only really locked me away when my parents died when I was seventeen,"

"How old are you then?" Jisung mumbles. Felix hears him. "I'm almost nineteen. It's a few months away. September."

"Oh," Jisung looks up at him. He's just a bit taller than him, but it's enough to create a clear difference between them. "Me too,"

Silence falls around them for a while until Jisung trips on a root of a nearby tree and falls face first if it wasn't for Felix's grip on his shoulder.

"Sorry," Jisung mutters. "The shoes are a little too big."

"Doesn't help that you haven't been anywhere else except the facility for seven years," Felix muses and Jisung sighs heavily. "Yeah," He mumbles.

→

They finally catch up with them when they find them sitting outside of a cave's entrance.

“Do you not know what animals live in caves!?” The Hwang boy is shrieking at the man with curled brown locks.

“Hyunjin,” he places a hand on his shoulder. “Minho and I lived out in the forests for months and we came back in once piece!”

“Have you not heard of bears, those big fuzzy things with the big teeth? Claws! Ring a bell?”

“You could always go first to see if it’s there?” The man suggests and that elicits a scream from Hyunjin’s throat and a slap to his bicep.

“Chan, I swear to god I am not in any condition to perform surgery on seven other people if there’s a fucking beast in there!”

“Chill,” Changbin slaps Hyunjin on his shoulder. “Chan and Minho already said they’re going in first,”

“But!” Changbin hisses at him and Hyunjin pouts.

Felix silently settles on the other side of the cave where no one else is standing and sits on a fallen log. Jisung follows him, finding himself already strangely attached to the blonde boy.

“He’s a doctor?” Felix cocks his head as they watch Chan and the man that Jisung kicked in the balls earlier— Minho he had concluded by both Chan and Changbin referring to him— wander into the cave, flashlights tightly gripped in their hands.

“I guess so.” Jisung murmurs along with a small shrug of his shoulders.

He knows he is. He had been in his hands once.

He was seventeen.

Hyunjin was walking the halls, past Jisung's room when the scream had attracted him to the boy's room. Jisung remembers this time of his life vaguely— too painful for him to want to remember but he recalls Hyunjin stepping into his room and rushing him out to the treatment room while he was in hysterics.

Hyunjin had been the one to break the news to him in a small voice.

Jisung didn't need it but ever since that day, his dislike for the doctor's son had grown into a deep hatred that reminded him of the dark day. The day that his body reminded him that he was a mutation to the world.

Jisung hated that.

Chan and Minho wander out after five minutes, unharmed and Hyunjin lets out a deep sigh, visibly deflating when he sees them unscathed.

"It's not that deep but it should fit us all pretty comfortably," Chan concludes. His eyes wander over to Jisung and Felix and he smiles gently. "You guys should come in and rest for a bit."

Felix rises first and turns back to Jisung.

The sun has come up high enough in the sky for the pale morning light to illuminate the earth and through the thick canopy, weak sunlight beams in and allows their eyes to finally see more than just shadows.

Felix gasps at Jisung and holds onto his shoulder. "You're bleeding!" He points to his thigh and Jisung looks down to see the wound oozing blood again. It wasn't a terribly big wound, but it was deep enough for it to look worse than what it actually felt. Jisung had

barely noticed it at all.

“He’s crazy,” Jisung looks up to see Minho talking while looking directly at him. Minho doesn’t advert his gaze, so Jisung does, suddenly uncomfortable under his intense gaze. It didn’t send waves of fear through him as it had done when Changbin was staring at him with fiery fury in his sharp eyes, but it makes his stomach churn and his nerve ends tingle.

“He dug out a tracker with a needle,”

Felix looks at him with raised eyebrows. “What?” Jisung frowns. “Was I supposed to leave it in and lead them right to where we are?”

“Fair point,” Minho concludes.

“You know I’m going to have to take a look at that, right?”

His voice enters his ears and just that is enough for his stomach to flip, his pulse thumping wildly under his skin. It was painful. Every time he talked, he saw his face he was reminded of white walls, the endless procedures and the vivid red splattered across a white canvas, filling him with the conflicting feelings that left him hollow and numb.

Jisung stands and stays by Felix's side. “No thanks,” he mutters.

“You’re really getting on my nerves, kid,” Changbin barks at him with a furrow between his brows. “If that gets infected and you slow us down we should just leave you to get caught,”

Jisung feels his heart hit his stomach and he stares at Changbin, his eyes softening into a fearful look and his brows knitting tightly upwards.

Felix stands up taller and steps between the two, pushing Jisung gently behind him. “You’re being a jerk! Why would you say something like that after getting us out of there? Don’t you know how hard it was!” Jisung grips onto Felix's sleeve, sensing his rising emotion in his voice.

“He’s right,” Hyunjin murmurs to the shorter man. “You really are being a dick,”

“You need to think before you speak, Binnie,” Minho pats him on the shoulder before he slides back into the cave, three bags hanging off his arms.

Slowly everyone pours into the cave except for the three.

“I’m sorry,” Changbin lets out a sigh. “I was being insensitive and wasn’t thinking about everyone,” Felix accepts his apology with an apology of his own, but Jisung only scoffs and wanders into the cave, sitting away from the small group forming around the middle.

It’s wider than it is long and the air is earthy but it also blocks out enough light so they’ll be able to get some sleep before they’ll need to either walk further or set up a camp.

Personally, Jisung wants to keep going, go further and further away from the Capital as they can.

Felix plonks himself next to Jisung.

“Is this okay?” He gestures to himself sitting near him and Jisung shrugs but doesn’t move away from Felix.

He gently curls in on himself and closes his eyes, but not even after having them closed for a minute, he’s opening his heavy eyelids and met with a face he really doesn’t want to see.

“Can I at least clean it?” Hyunjin asks him. His voice is gentle and his eyes are kind, but that makes Jisung want to punch him so much more.

If he was so nice why did he just stand there while Jisung underwent changes that he’d never be able to fix for the rest of his life?

Jisung resents him for the worst reasons possible, but his wounds are opening and gaping at the seams, unwilling to patch up just because he’s offering his help now.

It’s useless.

“Why do you want to help me now?”

Hyunjin lets out a deep sigh. “I’ll leave the stuff and you can do it yourself then,”

“Fine,”

Jisung stares at Hyunjin retreating back before meeting Felix's pondering gaze. He just sighs loudly.

→

“He doesn’t like you at all,” Minho deadpans as Hyunjin stretches out beside him. “Nope,” Hyunjin folds his arms over his chest.

“You not have anything to add to that?” Minho prods a bit further but Hyunjin shakes his head. “I don’t think its exactly my place or story to tell,”

Minho just hums and nods gently. “You should sleep too,” the older man tells him.

But Hyunjin’s mind is running too fast to shut off to sleep and when he steals a look at Jisung in the corner, he mind flashes with the look of pure fear and distress in his eyes, his screams filling his ears and his heartbeat picks up in his chest.

Hyunjin can’t seem to blame Jisung for his obvious hatred for him either.

He had stood there far too long, seen far too much that Jisung had never wanted him to ever witness and the bond of trust they never had time to form was served at the most crucial point, the beginning.

And truthfully, Hyunjin can’t see a beginning for the two of them for a long time.

But they don't have a choice. Out here, it's just them and Jisung will eventually have to put up with him, or maybe it's just Hyunjin's hope. His heart pangs at the hatred he has for him and Hyunjin wants a beginning. A beginning that doesn't have an end.

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Notes for the Chapter:

AAHHH HOW GOOD WAS THE CONCERT!!!!

i just wanted to say THANK YOU SO MUCH!!! bc I've never had this much support and feedback ever and I'm so overwhelmed in the best way!! i really love reading comments and really when i say they lighten my day i truly mean it. thank u guys for giving me fic a chance :'))

Notes for the Chapter:

I CANT HELP MYSELF AAA but i honestly thought the last update was too small so here u have two!!!

Time seems to be flowing differently.

It could just be that Jisung had finally fallen asleep as morning broke throughout the thick canopy, awoken when the soft morning rays of light had turned into a warm golden light that warmed up skin underneath its kiss. It could be nothing more than the fact that he was used to falling asleep in pitch black and waking to bright white.

Time had slowed endlessly in the facility. A day was never fast, it was dull and achingly long. Jisung had spent seven years there, but it felt like centuries, each day a decade.

But here, Jisung can only stare up at the tops of the green trees, astounded by nature that he didn't have the privilege to see in the four white walls that enclosed him for so long. The light on his skin was abnormal to him, the way his skin felt after spending time in the natural light had made panic first soar through his chest.

He had grown accustomed to artificial light that did nothing but illuminated the white prison in even brighter, white light.

But the sunlight felt soft against his skin and it slowly heats him up from the outside to his core. The warmth that radiates from his skin strangely comforts him, reminding him of days when he'd try to fish

in a pond, only to end up with sunburn down his back.

Jisung didn't feel comfortable here, not quite yet. The people he were with were just as foreign as anything else Jisung has encountered in the last seven years, but it was accompanied with a force that soothed at his frayed edges.

Felix smiles ever so gently at him after Jisung catches him watching him stare up at the sun, where the light is pouring through the gaps in the leaves.

"You didn't get to see much sun, huh?" He asks gently, sitting himself down to the boy who was meant to be collecting water in the canteens from the nearby river.

Jisung can only scoff. "I didn't see much of anything," he watches as Felix deflates a little, maybe from his tone or his answer, probably both. Jisung knows he should be nicer to Felix. Even though he's known him for a few hours, he knows Felix means no harm at all. Jisung thinks Felix is nice, he knows he wants Jisung to be friendly back at him, but Jisung doesn't know how to.

The last time Jisung can remember interacting with anyone in a friendly way was before the disease had broken out. His friend, Jooyeon had been his only friend and after she had succumbed to the illness that rampaged over the land, Jisung was left with nothing but a burden of responsibility and soon, parents that had seemed to forget his existence if it wasn't for him bringing them food.

The thought of his parents brings a turmoil back inside him that he

hasn't felt in quite a while. The first few years after his father had sold him, he felt nothing but pure hatred for his parents, that hasn't changed but over time it left his mind, too many other worries entering and taking over the space that belonged to them.

A bitter taste fills his mouth and he glares at nothing and silently gets up, holding the bag with the canteens with one hand.

He leaves Felix behind in the small clearing and stomps towards the river.

Jisung hasn't felt much these past years. His heart had hardened in his chest, becoming an impenetrable fortress that protected him from the emotions that once wanted to swallow him up whole.

He can remember the feelings that came with all the negative emotions, but Jisung has truly forgotten the feelings that came with positive emotions, the nice feelings. Jisung doesn't recall any of them.

He wanders back to the temporary camp where he finds everyone sitting outside of the cave, either on the earth or situated on a fallen log near the entrance of the cave.

"Everyone is here now," Chan claps his hands. Jisung drops the backpack near the entrance and leans against the trunk of a tree, a little away from the rest of the group but close enough to be considered a part of it.

“Okay, wow, this is a lot more awkward than I had initially imagined,” Chan grimaces slightly, but he forces a smile on his face. “So, hi, um... I thought it was time to give you guys a better explanation of what’s going on,”

“That would be nice,” Jisung doesn’t know the boy’s name, but he’s taller than the other two that had also been rescued from the facility.

“Well... I don’t know if any of you recognise Hyunjin here,” Chan gestures to the tall boy sitting next to him. Jisung scoffs and turns his head away from Hyunjin. He pretends he doesn’t feel his gaze linger. “Right...” Chan continues on. “We had the insight into what was happening in there, so we decided to help,”

“Is that it?” Jisung drawls out. His arms are crossed over his chest and his eyes are narrowed in a glare. “Because you heard of the things that were happening, you thought you could just break us out? Do you even have a plan of where we can go now? Because I don’t know if you thought about this detail, but the moment you step foot anywhere near the Capital and the states surrounding it, you’ll be killed and us?” Jisung can’t help his voice rising. “The life you tried to save us from would only be harshly printed down on us and we’d be plunged into a life we didn’t ask for!”

Chan grows a frown as he talks and Changbin is staring back at him. Hyunjin is staring at his feet and Minho is looking past him, into the distance.

“We do have a plan,” Minho is the one to speak up.

“And you can listen to us if you’d like or you can live with that

thought in your mind for the rest of the time that we're together."

Jisung takes in a greedy amount of air.

"What is it then?"

"We go as far north as we can," Changbin fills in.

Really, that means absolutely nothing to Jisung. He had lived in the slums his whole life before being sheltered in the facility. He didn't have the entitlement of education, so Jisung truly has no damn idea what going north means.

Judging from the reactions of the others, they do though and it leaves Jisung feeling isolated from this new group.

"North?" Felix pipes up and his eyes are wide. Chan nods in confirmation. "My family hailed from the north," he says softly. Chan's eyes light up after Felix's confession. "Mine too!" He smiles widely. "My Great-Grandparents came to the Capital and here we are now,"

"But what happens when we get to the end of the land?" The voice belongs to the boy with deep black hair and sparkly fox-like eyes. "The ocean there is vast,"

"But not impossible, Jeongin," Chan concludes. Jisung stares at him. The ocean was an unknown place, a place known for danger. A threat

to humanity. Its rising levels had swallowed much land that used to be habilitated by humans in the past. It was unexplored now, left alone to thrive by itself.

The thought gives Jisung shivers down his spine.

“Then what? If we survive the trip over the ocean, what do we do then?” Felix is the one to ask. Jisung falls back against the tree, happy to just observe and listen to the conversation.

“We go to Mydar,” Minho gives them a tight-lipped smile. Jisung is lost once more but the others gasp. “But that’s a place of legend!” The boy with the soft eyes yells out, obviously shocked by the proclaim.

“Is it?” Minho shoots back. Felix starts up next. “Seungmin is right,” He sounds slightly panicked himself. “No one in the Capital has proof of the colony!”

“Is it so impossible?” Hyunjin asks them. “If there is such a place, so high up, far away from everything would you think they’d give themselves away to foreign places, just waiting to be overrun by corruption?” Felix and the taller boy next to him, Seungmin both look to each other, frowns marring their features.

“We could be safe forever. They won’t dare to even think of a trip so far and hard.” Jisung swallows at that. “What if we don’t make it then? If it’s so difficult for a society with high technology to not dare to complete it?”

“We can lose them and make it,” Chan tells him. “We can do it. It will be hard, but we can do this. It’s that or getting caught.”

Jisung clears his throat, already making up his mind. He moves his body form leaning on the tree and moves into the crowd.

“Then,” he says. He takes a deep breath in. “When do we leave?”

→

Jisung knows it’s risky.

The risks of getting caught were higher than anyone really felt comfortable with, but it was a risk they had all collectively decided on going ahead with because, really, going back was not even an option.

They leave the cave camp at dusk, an hour before the sun was to appear over their heads.

Jisung still hadn’t grown any closer to any of them during the night. Felix still tolerated his presence and he talked to him every so often. Changbin still is iffy around him, rightfully so but Jisung acts as if he doesn’t exist which seems to piss Changbin off even more.

And Jisung doesn't even spare Hyunjin another glance.

Jisung adjusts the backpack on his back as they climb uphill. They hadn't exited the forest yet, Chan had predicted that it would take at least another week to navigate their way out of the thick forest. Minho had gifted everyone a knife before leaving this morning. They kept them near their hip, close by in case they needed to protect themselves. Jisung had watched wearily as the older four men slung guns over their chests.

He understood it was precautionary and for everyone's safety, but Jisung doesn't trust anyone quite yet.

Jisung feels lonely. He feels lonelier than he did when it was just him and the beeping of the drip in his hand.

Before, in that room, he had thought that was the loneliest he could get. But then the days when he was seventeen came. When he was left all alone, not even a little flutter to keep him company anymore, he had felt the loneliest he had ever felt in his entire life.

And it was. He had never felt the deep pang of loneliness as much as he did then. It had never quite disappeared, but it had eased off slowly.

But it was different here. The loneliness didn't compare to the days it

did when he was seventeen, but it still hurt. This time, he was surrounded with people, out in the open with nothing but the sun above their heads. But those people felt distant, too far away and Jisung was struck with conflicting emotions again. He wanted to grow to trust them, get closer because this journey is not going to be anywhere close to being easy, but the other part of him bubbles over when someone speaks.

He's been too long without human companionship that he doesn't know how to process it anymore.

Jisung struggles silently. He struggles through the exhaustion put on his body, unused to such use of his body and every time they stop to rest, Jisung crumbles like a leaf and gives in to sleep so easily. He struggles through intrusive thoughts. *They won't like me. They already said they'd leave me behind* . Jisung pushes himself harder and harder each passing day, trying to keep up with the group because he can't get left behind.

Jisung can act as aloof as he wants, but it will never change the fact that he knows he needs everyone just as much as they need him.

It's a strangely comforting thought.

When they reach the edge of the forest just as afternoon hits one week later, Jisung lets out a loud sigh and slumps against a lone tree. The landscape changes right before his eyes. Instead of lush trees and shrubs, logs covered in moss, the scenery changes to open fields and

Jisung can barely see the edge of the grass thinning, but it's there to tell of another landscape change.

Instead of journeying on through the open fields, they decide to camp in the outskirts of the forest. It was risky to even travel through such open areas and even worse to camp in them.

"Are you hungry?" Felix wiggles a little closer to Jisung. "A bit," he admits and accepts the piece of cooked meat offered to him. Minho had hunted it down back in the forest just yesterday and Jisung has never been so grateful in a long time for food.

"You know," Felix starts off softly. He swallows his food before turning towards Jisung. "If you need to talk to anyone, at all I'll always listen to you," his offer is sincere and Jisung knows he means it. He doesn't know what brought it on, but Jisung doesn't dig deeper.

"Thanks," Jisung mutters.

Felix looks at him with tightly pressed lips. He looks like he has much more to say like he was expecting Jisung to break out of his protective layers and pour his heart out to him.

"Okay," he only whispers back, mirroring Jisung's quietness.

Jisung has nightmares.

They're born of his own mind, his memories and every time they appear in his mind during sleep, Jisung wakes, disorientated and gasping for air, checking over his body and around him that his nightmare wasn't real.

The nightmares remind him of things too painful to want to remember.

He dreams of his baby being born, ever so tiny and as soon as they let out little cries, noises of life Jisung grows cold as he watches a masked nurse take the tiny thing away. That one leaves him with nausea throwing him around and a hollow feeling in his chest.

He recalls the night when he was seventeen many times, vivid red and the sickening feeling of relief and grief.

Jisung hadn't had nightmares since he left the facility. He had thought that place had been the main cause of them. That place had been unforgiving and Jisung had been swallowed whole in its

unforgivingness.

But he dreams this night.

They all had seemed to come back just to laugh at him, behind his shut eyelids he can see the vivid memory of red blood against white, and the picture of his middle swelling only to be robbed of the life that had made him less lonely.

Jisung gasps out loudly.

Hands are cupping his cheeks softly as he comes back to and when his eyes open, he's met with Felix's concerned face. Nausea churns his stomach around and he scampers up from his position laying down to on his knees, hunched over and promptly throwing up.

Jisung is just glad he had chosen his regular spot away from the group again last night.

Felix's small hands land gently on his back, rubbing soothing circles that helps him control the spasming of his stomach quicker. Felix doesn't say anything about the tears running down his cheeks, but he silently opens his arms and Jisung surprises himself when he falls into them, sobbing into his shoulder.

His hands grasp desperately on his abdomen and it leaves him feeling

weak and helpless. “They can’t hurt you here Sungie,” Felix whispers to him. His hands rub his back softly and even after Jisung stops his hysterics, he’s a pile of limp limbs in Felix’s arms.

“We’ll keep you safe,” It’s not an empty promise, Jisung can sense that much.

He doesn’t even budge when Felix settles to lay next to him, instead, they cling onto each other, offering each other comfort that they both desperately needed.

The feeling of a body next to his own is so foreign that Jisung is too tense to fall asleep but when Felix’s soft voice fills his ears, telling him of stories he’s not sure are real or not, Jisung relaxes and it doesn’t take much more for the spell of sleep to fall over him.

→

Jisung grows more fond of Felix each passing moment. From the time they wake up, Felix only smiles at him and pats his cheek softly. No questions asked. Jisung is more than grateful.

Jisung feels slightly uncomfortable, he had not only had a nightmare that had obviously messed with him enough to make him physically sick, but he had shown his vulnerable side to Felix and he had continued to show it to him, even when they gripped onto each other

during sleep.

The morning shrouds them with soft light and Jisung curls into the blanket further. He watches as the others rise from sleep around him and when the sun is finally high above their heads, everyone has woken.

Jisung creeps forward from his blanket when Chan begins giving out food and water. He knows he has to put food and water in his body even though his stomach is still suffering the side effects of head-spinning nausea. He eats little and slow, testing his limits and Jisung stops as soon as he feels weight in his belly and offers Felix the rest of his portion. The smiley boy takes it gratefully.

“Do you think we can make it through the fields in one day?” Jeongin asks around a mouthful of food. Chan hums at his question. “Of course, we should be able to make it close enough to the rapids soon,” Jisung perks up at that.

“The name doesn’t sound too pleasing,” Jeongin murmurs and Minho sighs from next to him. “No one has been there so we can’t say much, but I’m with you,”

“How long do you think the whole journey will take?” Chan seems to calculate this for a while. “At least three or four months,” Jisung’s breath hitches. No one looks at him but Felix gives him a soft pat on his back.

“I know it’s really daunting,” Chan sighs. “But we can do this. Together,”

Jisung looks down at his hands in his lap and grimaces slightly.

“Once we cross the rapids we should get to know each other better. Since we should be able to have a bit of a break.”

Felix doesn't leave Jisung's side throughout the whole day. When they had been getting ready to set out, Felix had taken the backpack Jisung was supposed to carry. It was Felix's day off from carrying one of the large bags on his back, but one look at Jisung he had sacrificed his comfort day.

Jisung thanks him quietly and Felix only smiles brightly at him, obviously happy to help and even happier to hear Jisung's gratitude.

The walk is hard out in the open. With no protection from the sun, the skin exposed on the back of his neck burns in the bright rays. The rest of his body is covered, but it doesn't stop the heat from affecting him. His clothes are mostly all back, save for the white stripes on the too big long sleeve shirt which traps in the heat and creates a sauna between the fabric and his skin.

“Sung,” Felix stops him when the rapids are just in sight in the distance. He can see water on the horizon and he wants to push himself further, but he feels as if his head is suddenly been replaced with bricks and it weighs his body down. Blood pounds in his head and when the boy's voice fills his ears, he winces, overcome with a migraine.

“Hey,” He grabs onto his arm, concerned and when Jisung just screws up his nose, pressing a hand to his temples, Felix makes a noise of

alarm. “Hey, hey sit down,” he gently pulls him down and the moment Jisung sits down, dizziness overcomes him and he’s glad that Felix had caught it before he had even felt it.

“Do you have water?” Jisung asks drowsily. His head is cradled between his knees, but the pounding won’t stop and Jisung’s anxiety spikes when he feels nausea curl around in his belly. “Hang on,” Felix rustles through the bag and when it falls down on the ground, Jisung can hear that it had attracted the others attention.

“Jisung? Are you okay?” Chan’s voice always has a comforting edge to it, but noise just makes Jisung feel as if his skull is about to combust. Felix hands him water and he takes small sips. “I’ll be fine,” he tries to say but as he talks, bile threatens to rise up his throat. He swallows harshly and goes back to the water.

A hand lands gently on his shoulder and at first, he thinks its Felix, but he’s grown accustomed to the feeling of the small and soft hands that grasp him gently and this isn’t his hand. It’s a much larger hand, a spacious palm stretching across the whole span of his shoulder, the fingers gently pressing into the skin of his neck.

He shakes the hand off him as soon as he recalls the touch.

It had plagued him in his nightmares, the feeling of strong palms holding him together as life seeped out of him. The touch had burned into his mind, reminding him of the day he had suffered loss.

Hyunjin meets his eyes, his gaze is apologetic and concerned. But the look of his face sends Jisung into a frenzy and before he knows it,

he's glaring and backing away slowly.

"Don't touch me," he growls out slowly, clear enough and his tone heavy with malice, a clear warning. Hyunjin gulps again and he's a splitting image of his younger self, holding the clipboard to his chest while Jisung lay on the treatment bed.

"You're hurting," Hyunjin whispers out gently. His voice doesn't hurt his head due to the softness he uses but it's a voice that hurts his heart. A voice laced with heavy memories.

"I don't care, just leave me alone!" His own scream tips him over the edge and he squeezes his eyes shut as red hot pain fills his body.

Chan grips Hyunjin's arm and pulls him away, shaking his head softly. "Chan," the younger boy cries out softly, very clearly distraught. "I don't know how to help him,"

"Let's just stop here for the night, okay? Maybe he'll be fine after a good sleep?"

Sleep embraces Jisung's body as soon as he's laid close to Felix and his eyes close.

It sweeps over him quickly and it breaks just as quickly when the

images appear behind his eyelids once more.

Felix wakes again, rubs his back and brushes hair from his eyes. “You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to,” Felix says gently, careful not to wake anyone else. “But you can confide in me. I’m not going to judge you or belittle you,”

“I know,” Jisung says and for the first time, Felix hears his soft voice, hollowed out from malicious intent and Felix finds a warmth singing in his chest. “But it just hurts so much,” he presses a clenched fist to his heart and bangs it against his chest as if it will rid of the pain.

“You’re strong,” Felix tells him gently. “We can get through this time together, okay? If you’re only comfortable when I’m around I won’t leave your side,”

“It makes me feel bad,” Jisung admits. “But thank you.”

Felix is warm, he shines brightly even in the dark of the night, and even through his tear glazed vision, Jisung thinks that he’s too good for such a broken world.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

twt: @sungiesprouts

THE JILIX IN THIS FIC GOD also peep the slowburn tag... when i say slowburn i don't mean the slowburn in my last longfic but i mean, the main ship doesn't

even talk properly until chapter 10. slowburn. god.

7. 6→

Notes for the Chapter:

this chapter is slightly heavier than the rest!! be careful!!

Chan follows Hyunjin's gaze, not surprised that his eyes land on Jisung's small form.

The tall boy looks miserable and it's not just this that makes Chan realise that there is— was— something going on between them that was deeper than he had initially thought. It's almost a lost cause, too because Hyunjin refuses to tell anyone what happened between them, claiming he didn't want to break Jisung's trust further— Minho had scoffed and said there was not one ounce of trust between as it is— and that it wasn't his place to tell such a story, and Jisung, whose story it was to tell has barely spoken a word to anyone except Felix. Chan's just glad Jisung has someone to talk to, but it creates a bruising feeling in his chest at the thought of making the small boy uncomfortable.

The boy is lying with Felix, pulled tight to the taller boys chest and in a deep sleep. Felix had grown progressively more protective of him as time went on and slowly, Chan can see a friendship developing but he watches carefully, knowing that Jisung has no idea that he's forming a strong bond.

Whatever had happened to Jisung, Chan knows hadn't been good. Not because of his closed of personality and his tongue that shoots to hurt, but the way he fails to find words to speak, how to act around the presence of other humans and Chan has witnessed a few times of him drifting away, not even Felix's efforts to bring him back work and when he returns, there's a glint in his eyes that causes Chan's

stomach to flip around nervously. He looks distant all the time, unapproachable but Chan can see through him and he swears there's a young boy in there, a spirit forged out of the deepest fires in hell.

And as strong that is, Chan knows that with time he will see his spirit awaken and Jisung will be a force to be reckoned with.

"I think you're going to have to be getting creative with how you can approach him," Chan tells Hyunjin who then groans, his head in his hands. "Or you could wait for him to come to you," Minho chips in and Hyunjin turns and glares at him. "He won't let me anywhere near him!" Minho shrugs.

"I'm just worried about something," Hyunjin mumbles again, groaning as he pulls at his face at his hands. "Oh?" Minho raises a brow. "Are you inclined to share, or this another privacy infringement?" Hyunjin scoffs at him and punches his shoulder, but then he deflates like a balloon. "Yes..."

Chan can only sigh.

→

"So!" Chan turns around to them with a wary smile on his face. "Who's a good swimmer?" Jisung watches around him as Felix, Seungmin, Hyunjin and Changbin raise their hands around them.

“Okay good! That’s more than I actually thought. The rapids are pretty calm right now,” Chan gestures to the several rivers with fast currents behind him and smiles broadly. Jisung can’t really remember a time where Chan hasn’t smiled. Really, Jisung commends him for that.

“Minho you can cross with Hyunjin, Binne with Jeongin? You okay with that?” The fox-eyed boy brightens up and nods. “Seungmin and Felix?” Jisung frowns as soon as he hears Felix’s name, his name not following.

“And Jisung,” Chan gives him a kind smile and Jisung isn’t really upset to be going across the rivers with Chan, he has nothing against the kindhearted man but Felix is the only one he could stand for long periods of time, the only person who he was alright with touching.

“You’re with me.”

Jisung decides to speak against it. “But why can’t I go with Felix, he says he’s a strong swimmer,” He has a frown marred between his brows and Chan hums, his mouth pressed out into a line.

“I don’t want to offend you,” he starts off gently, but that already pushes a button on Jisung’s fuse. “But your endurance is a bit low and I want to make sure we all get over safely.” Jisung sighs and as much as he’d like to argue, he can’t because it’s true.

“We’ll go last just incase,” Chan tells him. “What about the bags?” Jeongin questions. He’s holding tightly onto Changbin’s hand and the muscled man looks quite pleased, to say the least. “They’ll be okay,”

Chan tells him. "They're waterproof,"

"Nice," Minho muses, giving him two thumbs up. He links arms with Hyunjin and looks at Jisung and tilts his head, carefully studying him. Jisung feels strangely small underneath his gaze and shuffles unconsciously behind Chan a little. He flinches when Minho finishes off with a wink before wadding into the water with Hyunjin close to his side.

"Uh?" Jisung blinks and then looks up at Chan who sheepishly laughs. "Minho's special," he says. "A bit weird, but he's lovely."

Jisung grimaces. "Okay..."

Chan waits until he sees everyone safe on the other side. It takes at least half an hour, easily and Jisung has opted to sit down while Chan fusses and watches them cross through the currents with caution.

"You ready?" Chan questions him but Jisung shakes his head. "I really can't swim. I don't remember how to and are you sure the water isn't going to drag me away?" He says in one breath and Chan places a steady hand to his shoulder. "Jisung, I'll hold you, okay. And besides, you would have to be super light for the water to take you away,"

Jisung gets dragged away in the largest river.

Chan's grip on him had loosened just the tiniest bit, but the wind had suddenly picked up and brought a faster current, one that was unforgiving and Jisung can't help but scream as he gets dragged from Chan's embrace.

Chan had been wrong, terribly wrong because Jisung is definitely light enough to be carried away in the currents. Even in the facility after they had forced his body to put on extra fat, he was underweight but the percentage of body fat he held was deemed healthy enough to carry.

Jisung knew he was light. His own suspicions of being lighter than what another boy his age should be had only really been confirmed when he was hoisted over the wall by Hyunjin. He had almost thrown him if he hadn't stopped in the last few seconds, obviously expecting him to be heavier than he was. It was probably the oversized clothing that hid his small frame.

The water is cold, something Jisung had craved the previous day when he was struck with a migraine, but now it feels like he's going to freeze to the bone in the currents.

Just as his head slips underwater, water filling his lungs a hand grips the back of his shirt and he's pulled tight to a warm body.

Jisung clings to Chan, all previous apprehension gone.

Chan's grip on him is tight, one muscled arm around his shoulders and the other wrapped around his thin waist, pressing him flush to his front as he wades through the currents.

He pushes Jisung out of the water and as soon as he hits the land, Jisung collapses and takes in deep breaths, still occasionally coughing up water.

“Oh yeah totally not light enough to get carried out!” Jisung cries as he looks up at Chan who trudges out of the water, as equally drenched as Jisung. “I’m sorry!” Chan fumbles to help him back to his feet, his face cast with obvious worry and sympathy.

Jisung bundles the fabric of his oversized shirt and rings it out, watching the water flowing out from the material with a grimace.

Felix appears by his side, eyes wide and Jisung is thrown into his embrace before he can even react. “You scared me!” Felix cries into his shoulder. Jisung freezes in Felix's hold, unsure how to comfort the boy. He’s never had the chance to comfort anyone but himself and the thought that others too needed comfort was something foreign.

He gently pats Felix's back and when they’re finally heading away, through the much smaller streams and across large stones lying in the river beds, Jisung can’t shake the feeling of failure off him.

Not because of his unwelcome adventure through the rapids, but because the hollowness he is so aware of throbs in his chest, alerting

him that he was too different from the rest. Felix could offer endless comfort to him, but Jisung was left in shambles when it was his time to give back.

Maybe that's what put him on edge.

The campfire is warm against one side of Jisung's face, the other being nipped by the chills of the night. He's bundled up in the blanket he's basically claimed as his own, keeping his body heat in like a cocoon around him. Felix is beside him. That's become the norm now and Jeongin has crept closer to Felix, to Jisung, although clearly hesitant to interact with Jisung.

Jisung really can't find himself to care much about that.

Chan is telling a story rather animatedly, using his hands too much that he had already smacked Minho across the mouth which leads to a wrestle between them. Jisung watches the curly-haired man talk about one of he and Minho's adventures in the wild and sighs.

He wishes could've collected stories like theirs, but the only stories he had are ones of white walls, silver needles, his heartbreaking and blood.

Chan talks about his adventures fondly, Minho mirroring his smile as he recalls their lives together.

Jisung sits on the edge of tumbling into the tunnel that shows him white light and bright red.

In passing, Jisung hears Chan asks Seungmin a question.

“Yeah,” He hears Seungmin say. “Us three have always been close with each other,” Jisung perks up slightly at that. He knew that he had seen them plenty of times in the facility, but had walked away from their advances too many times before they all finally gave up on him and left him by himself.

Changbin's eyes land on him, obviously wondering why Jisung had never been close even though he had been in the same place they had. Jisung grumbles under his breath and turns his head, the cold side of his face being warmed up by the open fire now.

“Not Jisung?” Changbin asks and Jisung heaves out a deep sigh.

“Uhh,” Seungmin shuffles a bit. “We never really got the chance to talk to him... until now.” Seungmin lifts his hand in a sorry excuse for a wave. “Hi, Jisung...”

Jisung huffs but gives him a hi back, bit doesn't say anything else.

“Jisung was there before any of us,” Felix says softly. “We kind of just floated together... Jisung was a bit indifferent,”

“That's understandable though,” Chan tells him as if he could see Jisung's balled up fists underneath his blanket. He offers him a soft smile, the same one that felt as if it could soften the fraying edges of

his gnarling anxiety, but this time it gives him another rush of heat that he can pinpoint as anger.

“I entered when I was fourteen,” Jeongin’s voice is soft and at the confession, Jisung’s head picks up, eyes wider than they previously were. Jeongin had entered at fourteen. Three years older than what Jisung had been at the time he was surrendered to the hands of the government. Three years.

Everyone falls quiet as the boy begins to speak. “It wasn’t my idea,” his voice starts off quiet, barely even a hum but it’s loud enough for everyone to hear even the quiet crackling of the fire. “But I didn’t object to it when my parents brought it up... I thought it was an okay idea,” Jisung tears his eyes from the boy. His lip quivers and he catches it between his teeth.

“It was alright at first... but it was scary being away from my parents when I was so young,” Jisung actually scoffs at that. Jisung had been much younger, three years didn’t sound like too much but developmentally, Jisung was a young child, a child that deserved comfort from his mothers embrace and the soft kisses his father would leave on his forehead.

Jisung is full of envy.

“I was twelve,” Seungmin nods and points to Felix. “We pretty much came in together. My mother was the only one left in my family, they had died from an accident when I was just a baby and it was mothers dream to see her grandchildren be born safely, but then the disease broke out... she didn’t die... not that I know of but I entered willingly just to please my mother’s wishes,”

Jisung thinks it's stupid to live your life for someone else.

The beating of his heart will stop one day and he will look back, wishing he had never lived his life the way he did just to please someone. Jisung now will live the way he wants to, unhinged by peoples wishes. The heating in his gut is overbearing at the others stories.

Everyone had seemed to ignore Jisung's obvious judging, his sounds of disappointment and the heaving sighs that leave his lips.

Felix, the boy that has grown enough on him that Jisung actually wishes to be in his presence, when he talks, Jisung feels sick.

"I... I don't really know," He murmurs. "I saw the posters and thought 'wow'," he pauses briefly, looking around the group. Jisung doesn't meet his eyes. "I thought it was a good idea at the time. To be able to start a family in the future,"

Jisung scoffs loudly this time and frowns at Felix.

"Are you stupid!" He cries out, his fists bang on his thighs and Felix looks at him, shock evident in his eyes. He hadn't expected that type of behaviour from him at all.

"Hey!" Chan frowns at him. "That wasn't very nice,"

Jisung goes to open his mouth, to prove his point because these three boys had been so stupid, so so so stupid. They had a choice. They had stood there at one point in time, staring up at the posters that claimed would be their saving grace and had accepted it too easily and fallen into a life they could've easily avoided.

“Yeah, why are you so judgemental for, it's not like you're any better!” Jisung's not surprised that it's Changbin who shoots back at him.

Jisung stands up, the blanket in his fists.

“Why! Because you had it worse than those boys did?” Hyunjin slaps Changbin across his mouth, on purpose and Changbin turns to glare at the young doctor. “Why?” He hisses at him. Hyunjin gives him a look, hoping he'll shut up.

Jisung notices.

And the anger that grew deep in his belly is crawling up his throat, taking over his body.

“Stop it! If you're so protective why don't you just fucking tell them? Huh! Wouldn't that be easier instead of trying to keep me from hearing all this! Since you know so much about me why don't you tell them all, Hyunjin! Why not just tell them if it's so easy!”

“It’s not easy!” Hyunjin shouts back, eyes blown wide at the small boy. “Do you think it’s easy?”

Jisung growls. “Then I’ll—“

“Everyone stop!” Chan is standing between them, his arms stretched out and his chest rising at a slow rate, trying to calm himself down.

“Changbin, apologise to Jisung,”

“I’m not apologising until he realises that they’re in the same boat!”

Jisung lets out a sharp cry and bundles the blanket closer to his chest.

“I never had a choice!” He yells out. The fire is consuming him so much it hurts. His head is pounding with hot blood and he shakes in his spot, overrun with emotion for the first time in a long time.

His eyes shut tightly when silence washes over them.

“I was eleven,” he continues on, his voice shaky. His throat constricts at the feeling. “I grew up in the slums. We were poor and my parents held no remorse when they handed me over in return for money,”

He opens his eyes and meets Changbin's shocked gaze. "Those guys," he points to the boys behind him. "They had a choice. They were never locked up like a prisoner until they hit their fertile state. I," he gulps and he feels like sinking into the ground when he feels tears well in his eyes. "I was locked up for seven years, all by myself."

Jisung hugs the blanket closer to him and with one last look at the sudden fear and obvious regret that lays heavy over everyone's face, Jisung wanders a little further from the fire and lies down, his back to the crowd.

His body shakes throughout the night, residing anger poisoning his blood.

→

The footsteps are too obvious to Jisung that he doesn't even bother to turn around. Instead, he waits for Felix to settle by his side. He had climbed a small hill this morning and had settled at the top, overlooking the view down below.

He can see various animals in the clearing below and Jisung is fascinated.

Animals became rare during the centuries, many species had been wiped out to never return and though Jisung found that upsetting,

the amount of animals in his line of vision makes him feel that the animals were healing a whole lot better than humanity.

“Hey...” Felix is quieter than usual. He was quiet at first but after a few days he had opened and shone brightly, almost too brightly for Jisung to handle but it made Jisung feel at ease like he was in the hands of the sun itself.

“Hey,” Jisung greets back. They don’t look at each other but just sit in each others company, enjoying the view and wind that hostels their dirtied hair.

“You know last night...” Felix's voice carries off into the wind. It catches Jisung attention and he finally looks towards him. “I wanted to try to explain myself, you didn’t really wait for that,” Felix sounds disappointed and his stomach drops at the tone.

“Okay... sorry...” his voice isn’t full of sympathy but the smile he gets from Felix is enough to tell him that he accepts his apology full-heartedly.

“I like boys,” Felix starts off and Jisung nods along. He hadn’t ever said anything specific about his preferences but after last night Jisung had guessed that much after his confession of wanting to start a family.

“And when the posters were put up, I wanted so badly to be able to live out my dream to have a family with my future lover—“

“Felix, I—“

“Please Sungie, just let me finish first,” The nickname catches him off guard and Felix uses it as an opportunity to start again.

“I don’t think I saw what you did at all. My experience wasn’t really negative until they deemed me fertile,”

Jisung grows antsy and stands, shuffling closer to the incline of the hill. “I wanted it badly, Sungie to be able to have a family with my lover and I know that’s hard for you to digest, I never knew you were so sensitive because... because of your history with the facility, but I thought it was a good thing. I mean, I still think it's good that we can carry now,”

And Jisung explodes.

“Don’t you get it?” Jisung puffs out. “They mutate you into something we were never meant to be, they give us things that turn us into a totally different *thing* but you’re saying it's a good thing?” Felix stares at him, his pretty eyes wider than usual and a small grimace upturning on his plush looking lips. “Have you ever thought about it? Of course, you haven't, everyone saw the propaganda and thought ‘huh, this is amazing maybe we really can survive this’ but you know what Felix, propaganda is propaganda and when have they ever said that this was so you could go home to a husband and make a family of our own?”

A small frown settles between the blondes eyebrows. "Never," Jisung spits out, his words become rapid, faster as if the words are burning his tongue on the way out of his mouth. "We were made to be used, have strangers cocks fill us up and knock us up. Don't you know that? We were made so we'd lay there and take it!" Felix's bottom lip wobbles and Jisung doesn't bother stopping even Felix winces at the harshness of both his words and his voice.

"And tell me, Felix, that you wouldn't grow attached to that thing that you grow inside of you, the thing that keeps you up at night and flutters inside of you, tell me you wouldn't break once they took that baby away from you as soon as you use up all your strength and energy to meet that thing!"

Felix gulps, his eyes now unsteady and he shuffles backwards a little bit, growing fearful or overwhelmed, Jisung can't quite make it out in all his rage.

"They'd take our babies away, knock us up again as soon as possible and repeat the process until we become nothing but a womb, a hollow host of our own bodies,"

And when Felix cries, mirroring the tears sliding down Jisung's face, does he realise he was shouting, his tone full of spite.

"I don't know about you, Lix," Jisung says and the name comes out so naturally, he doesn't bother correcting himself. "But even I, who hates the thought of this whole thing, I know I'd grow attached, and I might even, terrifyingly enough, might come to love the tiny thing. And I can tell you that I wouldn't be able to live a life where my babies are taken from me one after another,"

Jisung says that with confidence because he had been there once already. He had grown attached to the fluttering inside his abdomen quickly, in just as little as four weeks, Jisung had fallen in love. A tainted love that had his head spinning with the knowledge of the future, but they had changed him, made him like this so he could love it and Jisung had felt his heart being ripped out of his chest when he lost the little flutter.

Jisung wipes the tears from his plush cheeks and tears his gaze from Felix. "I'm sorry," he whispers, turning on his heels and beginning to walk away. He means it this time. His voice holds emotion and Felix breaks out into sobs as soon as he detects it. Jisung cries harder too and he can't bear to hear his friend cry, so he runs.

His friend.

He doesn't know when they had crossed the barriers, but Jisung is comforted by Felix, he likes being around him and he thought well of him most of the time. Felix is the shining sun and Jisung is bathing in his light, but he was a broken piece of reflective glass. Jisung didn't shine, he reflected the boy's rays and gave them back.

He doesn't get far until he's crashing into a firm chest.

He looks up to meet Hyunjin who's staring down at him, a faraway look on his face but Jisung can see the fear and pain in his eyes. Empathy.

“I never knew,” is all he says softly.

→

The bright colours sang out to him, the words across the paper ruled to the wall of a building reduced rubble the government had forgotten about.

He had stood there, breathless, his heart running loops around in his chest.

For a whole year, Felix passed the poster daily, the decision slowly becoming concreted in his mind over time. Felix knew what he wanted to do. At twelve, Felix had made his mind up.

The only thing he had to tackle was his parents.

It had taken almost a year to build up his confidence to ask. Felix had heard them several times throughout the year talking about it, how terrifying it must be for the boys families to watch them go through such an unknown procedure.

They had been concerned at first, refusing their son to go, but Felix had persisted and when their friends started to drop dead, taken over by the disease his mother had looked down at him and cried, asking

him if that's what he truly wanted.

Felix entered when he was twelve.

He went through all the procedures that would lead him to be able to carry in the future and after each one, he was spent home, hand in hand with his father as he took him home to his mother.

Felix had support and not once did he regret his decision until the day came.

His mother had fallen ill and his father had succumbed to his own swallowing sadness and grief.

It was too quick for even Felix to barely notice, but his decision that he had been so sure of had slowly turned sour as the days passed and he was never allowed home, not allowed to send his parents off.

Felix was stuck.

His tears don't stop when Jisung disappears from his vision.

Jisung was right.

His words had made perfect sense and they were backed up with the sound of sorrow and devastation. Jisung knows everything.

Felix allows the sob trapped in his throat to exit, loudly echoing into the air around him.

Jisung had let down a barrier, tipped over the edge by Felix's own foolish dreamy perception of the facility. Jisung spoke truths, ones that ripped his tongue and bled out nothing but the truth. And Felix was stupid, optimistic in the worst possible way.

A hand lands softly on his shoulder and he flinches upon the contact. He finds himself drowning in warm brown eyes, inviting and ever so gentle.

And Felix clings to that.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HIII this chapter is honestly one i enjoyed writing !! im having a lot of fun writing this fic lol i always do but this one is very different to the stuff I've done before?? I just want to say a big thank you to everyone!!! Thank you for reading my work and leaving comments!! I've never had so much support before :DD thank you guys so much!! truly!!! I love all you guys input!!! <33333

tw- sungiesprouts

8. 7→

Notes for the Chapter:

HI EARLY CHAPTER I TOLD u i cant help myself sometimes :D honestly its mostly after i finish a chapter tbh... since i finished chapter 13 i felt that i had too much hoarded away JSDBFN

Hyunjin had a good life.

It was comfortable. Warm in the cold winters and cool in the hot summers.

His stomach didn't know the pang of hunger. He's never known the feeling of hunger gnarling away at his body. He went to sleep every night, warm under blankets that keep heat in and with a full belly.

Hyunjin didn't know the struggles of anyone under mid-class. He was sheltered, kept safe from the world.

Hyunjin never really had a choice in whether he wanted to become a doctor in the future, but he had seen how highly his father was regarded and his father was proud of him by default when Hyunjin said he wished to become like his father when he was just a tumbling little boy.

But the only thing Hyunjin had ever wished for since he was a little boy was to feel the warmth of his parents love and affection. Hyunjin had found himself sinking back into the corner, put on a pedestal for being born to such competent parents. They were busy and when Hyunjin had finally started the medical course his father had enrolled him in, Hyunjin had received hugs from his parents.

He couldn't remember the last time their skin had contact, but the warmth of their breath against his neck and the warmth radiating from their bodies had put a smile on his face. It was nice and so Hyunjin fell, diving face-first into the courses and graduating ahead his age, the top of all the classes.

His father had visited his room a few days after his sixteenth birthday. He was dressed in his work clouting still, obviously just getting home from his shift.

For a few years, his father had been chosen to work on the humanity project with the best scientists and Hyunjin had been astounded, fascinated by his father who managed to climb the ranks and become the doctor working on fixing the future.

Hyunjin had mixed feelings. He was proud of his father, proud to be his son but the thought of his job had sent unease through him.

And when his father had told him he was now to follow him to work every now and then, Hyunjin's breath had hitched in his throat.

The first day he had ever stepped foot near the isolated facility, his stomach had flipped instantly filled with dread and as soon he stepped over the threshold, Hyunjin thought something was wrong. It hurt his eyes at first and Hyunjin was overcome with so many emotions he would've shut off right there and then if he didn't remember who his father was and that he was standing right next to him.

Then, he met Jisung for the first time.

He was small, looking even more so in the large reclining medical bed he sat on. His eyes seemed so dull, so frightfully empty and when he had noticed him, Hyunjin's heart had stuttered in his chest, threatening to halt.

Heat had flashed through his body and that night he returned home, Hyunjin smelled of disinfectant and sweat. Through his sleep, those hollow eyes had haunted him.

He had tried to work up his courage to get out of his duty to go to the facility, but his father had announced him as the doctor to take over his work in the future and Hyunjin had shattered into bits at his own two feet.

He had been swallowed in love from his parents and if he were just months younger, he would've loved it and gone to bed in a good

mood and sleep soundlessly. But Hyunjin's eyes had been opened over the months he worked closely with his father.

Jisung was on his mind, hollow and terrifying and Hyunjin was at loss for his life.

Running away had been on his mind, but Hyunjin was a coward, too sheltered and wrapped in cotton wool to leave, but all it took was the day he found nurses whispering in the hall about the boy that had haunted his nights.

And Hyunjin ran, disgusted with himself and with a new loathing of the world.

Jisung was a child, a tiny fretful child when he was forcibly entered into the stupid project his father was so proud about. He had no choice, no voice and suddenly those hollow brown eyes held much more than what Hyunjin had initially seen.

How he had ended up where he had, in an underground boxing ring, Hyunjin doesn't think he'll ever know the answer to, but he doesn't mind if it's left unanswered for the rest of his life, because what came out of his sudden rash behaviour had led him to Chan.

Chan was strong, not just in the way Hyunjin had first seen him knock out a man almost three heads taller than him, but his demeanour, his eyes sparkled with this gentle simmer of determination.

From the first day that Hyunjin had ever met Chan, he thought of his eyes in the middle of the night when his mind wandered back to Jisung.

Chan and his little crew were inviting and Hyunjin quickly grew stronger, putting on a stronger front when he had to face the white building. It takes him months to climb up the ranks of the facility and soon enough he was handed his own white robe, one that matches his fathers and when he gets the title of doctor at the young age of seventeen Hyunjin sneaks out again to seek out Chan and his friends.

Hyunjin begins to frequent them more and more, enjoying each boys

company and he tells them stories, becomes friends with them too.

And then Hyunjin shatters.

Night shifts were something he had had to get used to, but Hyunjin trudged through the graveyard shift without any other doctors present. Really it was quite an honour to be trusted this much, he must be a lot more skilled than what he had given himself credit for, but nothing was to prepare him for what happened.

The halls were empty as he was walking down them in a sleepy haze. The shift was only a few hours in, but Hyunjin was already fighting sleep.

The scream cut through the air harshly, too high pitched that it rings in Hyunjin's ears seconds after it dissipates in thin air. Hyunjin had stilled for a few seconds, knowing exactly where the sound that comes from, but that knowledge caused fear to run through his veins.

Jisung barely spoke a word, barely lifted his head to even engage in anything, but to hear a shattering scream coming from his room had frightened Hyunjin right to the core.

He had known, of course, the news of a successful pregnancy floated through the staff members of the faculty and Hyunjin gulps.

Opening the door to Jisung's, he tried to brace himself for anything, anything at all.

But Hyunjin still freezes for a split second, his heart rushing to a skidding halt in his chest.

The quiet boy, the boy with hollow and daunting eyes in obvious agony on the floor, grasping the bloodied sheets in his fists as he cries, tears streaming down his face restlessly and the eyes that Hyunjin had only ever seen hollowed out were so full of pain that his knees buckled and he gripped tightly on the doorframe.

He was useless to the boy in those moments. All he could do was pick him up and his heart had tightened when he didn't even fight. Jisung

had only blubbered on, clutching his abdomen in one hand and his heart in the other.

Hyunjin could only watch helplessly as Jisung struggled through the waves of pain.

He had broken right after that moment and he had run to Chan in tears of his own, but nothing could mirror the anguish he saw on Jisung's face.

And now, Jisung stares up at him with reddened eyes, the brown orbs filled with tears. Hyunjin's heart is shaking in his chest, clenching painfully at what he had overheard Jisung yell.

“Never knew what?” Jisung spits at him.

“That you felt that way about this all... your baby,” Jisung then looks down at his feet as soon as Hyunjin mentions his little flutter.

“You were there,” Jisung hisses. “You were there when I lost the flutter, how could you not know?”

“I—“ Hyunjin swallows thickly. “I thought you were in pain.” He gently says. His voice is so gentle it feels like a gentle autumn breeze, but Jisung feels his heart pick up anyway.

“I was,” Jisung confirms. He sniffs and wipes more tears from his cheeks. “It felt like a stabbing knife through me, but my heart was torn out of my chest, too,” Hyunjin hangs his head low.

“I know you really don’t like me—“ Jisung scoffs and Hyunjin chews down on his bottom lip. “And you have a good reason for it, but can we at least be civil out here? Im afraid everything’s going to fall apart.”

“Again?” Jisung questions and Hyunjin nods his head. Things had fallen apart too many times already and it had been just over a week and a half.

“I’m not asking you to forgive me for what happened, for me being there and not leaving, but I promise if you ever want me to go away now, I’ll do it as soon as you ask,” Hyunjin promises and his eyes are sincere. Jisung sniffs once more, wondering when he’ll be able to stop crying.

“Whatever,” he replies and then walks off.

He had put up a strong front because as soon as he’s out of Hyunjin’s sight, he collapses gasping for air between his sobs. It had been painful, the mention of the flutter and his heart felt like it was beating in his throat and Jisung vaguely thought he might throw it up if he wasn’t careful.

The emotions are suffocating, a remorseless ocean that was threatening to drown him in its cruel waves. Jisung hasn’t felt this much in a while and it shows through the shaking of his hands and the uncontrollable crying fit he rides out.

Hours must’ve passed by the time he had calmed completely, but all that was left of him was exhaustion that draws out his energy right out of him.

“Oh, there you are!” Someone cries out and tiredly, Jisung lifts his head to meet with Minhø’s gaze.

Minho confuses Jisung. He has an aura around him, a mist almost that shrouds him in mystery. He changes quickly, his eyes playful one moment and the next, hardened and protective of the emotions lingering underneath. He could laugh at something, looking at ease and in other moments he looks completely untouchable.

This time, his gaze is a mix between the mysterious shroud, but ever so slightly he can see Minhø is intrigued.

“You were gone for a long time. We got worried,” Minhø tells him as he stalks forward.

Jisung stills.

Minho walks towards him like he is prey, his stance strong and that of a predator hunting down their next meal. But he's smiling so softly, it's too conflicting that Jisung doesn't make any noise and instead puts his head on his knees, watching him carefully.

He stops in front of him, his smile not failing but when he looks down into his eyes, a frown appears between his brows and his smile disappears.

Minho hums softly and gently bends down, grabbing onto Jisung's forearms and hauling him back to his feet.

"You and Felix had a fight?" He brushes leaves off Jisung's shirt. Jisung shrugs. He guesses they had, but it had been something else that had thrown Jisung off his course.

"Come on, everyone's waiting for you to come back," Minho pats his arm gently and begins to lead him back to the crowd.

"Is this really going to take months," Jisung asks. His voice is husky and quiet from his sobbing.

"If it takes any less than a few months it would be a miracle," Minho mutters. "It will take long." He nods his head. "But once we leave this land we should be much safer."

"Why?"

Minho cocks an eyebrow at him. "Ahh sorry I forgot you didn't grow up like us... not that it's a bad thing!" Jisung only shrugs, not bothered enough for a bigger reaction. "It's just that when the seas rose ages ago, settlements moved further inland and there's not as many as what there used to be. Not many people live out in the wild anymore, but they refused to contact each other after the Great Wars," Minho shrugs this time.

"To prevent war?" Jisung asks. "Yep," Minho nods his head. "The Great Wars almost destroyed everything. It took centuries to even recover from most of it," Jisung frowns at the news, but it really

works out in their favour now. "Is it dangerous... the land?"

"Not so much anymore," Minho answers. "It's been too long for it to really be dangerous. Besides nature has taken over pretty much everything again,"

"That's a good thing, though, right?"

"Of course," Minho smiles. "It keeps the earth's temperature down. No one wants a repeat of what happened during the Great Wars,"

Minho talks to him the whole walk back, and it is the most Jisung has talked and listened to in quite a while, but something about Minho is intriguing and Jisung can't find himself to mind the hand that's wrapped around his arm. Maybe he's just too tired?

The stark contrast from Minho's stalking stance and then the soft touch of his hand on his arm sends Jisung into a small spiral of confusion, but he forgets about it when the fire is in sight again.

"Shit," Minho hears Hyunjin mutter under his breath when he sits back down with him.

He watches as Jisung shuffles towards Felix, falling into his embrace while tucked next to Chan's side. They hear a few snuffles but no one says anything to the two boys.

"What?" Minho frowns at his younger friend who groans into his hands. "I forgot to ask Jisung the thing I've been worried about,"

"You guys talked?" Changbin asks, surprised. Hyunjin nods. "Pretty brief but it was long enough to be classified as a conversation, I think,"

"Well, then why don't you just go ask him now?" Changbin asks, pointing at the boy who's curled in Felix's embrace who's using Chan's lap as a pillow. Chan looks quite pleased with himself and Changbin snorts at him.

"I don't think it's a good idea," Hyunjin moans out, throwing his head

back. "Geez," Minho laughs. "It's actually important?"

"It could potentially change our whole dynamic!" He whisper-shouts and Changbin snorts. "What dynamic."

Hyunjin lets out a frustrated groan again and Minho frowns at him. "Really?"

"Really!" Hyunjin shouts back. "But I don't want to disturb them—just look!" He points to where Felix and Jisung are asleep in each others hold, obviously all bad blood between them gone as if it had never happened in the first place. "And when I was talking to Jisung earlier he was crying quite a bit,"

"I saw his eyes before when we were walking, you could tell,"

Hyunjin presses his lips together and his eyes soften as he takes in the small figure of Jisung clinging to his new friend.

"I'm glad," Hyunjin murmurs softly. Minho scoffs, "Of what?"

The taller boy smiles.

"That he finally has a friend,"

→

Jisung jolts awake.

The hand on his chest crawls into his skin and he hisses lightly as nails dig into his flesh.

Felix is looming over him, his eyes glassy and Jisung gasps lightly, sitting up slowly and bringing Felix's hands into his lap. "Why?" He asks alarmed.

He begins to look around their camp but finds nothing but the others sleeping around the crackling fire.

“You don’t think there are painkillers anywhere?” Felix asks through clenched teeth and Jisung opens his mouth, but no words fall out when he finds he doesn’t have anything to say.

“I don’t think so,” He settles on after a few seconds and Felix squeezes his eyes shut and his eyebrows contort into a deep frown. “But maybe Hyunjin is more prepared than we thought?”

“I doubt it...” Felix mumbles. “He didn’t give you any when you were sick before,”

“But that was a migraine,” Jisung says. He gives Felix's hands a squeeze. “You can usually sleep them off. But hey, what’s going on anyway? Are you hurt?”

Felix then juts out his bottom lip and his brows knit together, and overall he looks absolutely miserable.

“Cramps are terrible,”

Jisung stills for a few seconds before the realisation hits him. Felix had been changed just like him and Seungmin and Jeongin and suffered just as much of the monthly pain that fell upon them.

“We should just rip out these stupid implants,” Jisung then murmurs and Felix whines from the back of his throat. “But that would be really dangerous,” Felix says and Jisung sighs. Felix is right, taking out the metal implants would mess their system up and Jisung knows that the artificial makeup of the organs inside them are designed specifically to work with the implants and Jisung fears the unknown. If they ripped out the implants, what would it do to the rest of their bodies that had been modified?

“I can heat up some water for you?” Jisung offers gently. Felix tilts his head forward to be level with Jisung and a tiny smile pulls at his lips. “It sounds nice,” Felix murmurs as Jisung begins to move.

“Does it help?”

"I don't know," Jisung answers honestly. "I only ever asked for painkillers when the pains hit, but I think warmth would help. It was always less painful if I was warm," he answers as he pours some water from Felix's canteen into the pot that sits a meter away from the fire.

"It shouldn't take too long to boil," Jisung crawls back to Felix and lays by his side. Felix curls in on himself, his hands setting around his abdomen. "Sometimes I wish I had chosen not to go," Felix whispers.

The night is placid. The breeze is cool, but the still air is comforting enough to be able to sleep comfortably without shelter. Jisung pulls the blankets over both of them and hums gently. "Sometimes I wished I had run away as soon as my sister was born," Jisung murmurs back. It's one of his many sore spots and the mention of her sends a pang through his heart.

"As soon as she was born, it was like my parents forget I even existed. Until they found the opportunity to get rid of me for a reward." Felix juts out his bottom lips even further. His eyes are filled with sympathy and gently he reaches out a small hand to cup Jisung's full cheek. "Your cheeks are soft," he whispers. Jisung smiles ever so softly.

"I cannot fathom in words how hard it has been for you," Felix then tells him gently. "As soon as you said that last night I had suddenly regretted my whole life up to this point," Felix hums, pulls his hand back to rub his stomach. "It hurt my heart."

The sudden rumble of water surprises Jisung and he springs up, heading over to the pot of boiling water. He pours the hot water into the canteen, cooling it enough to drink right away, but still hot enough to sit as liquid warmth in Felix's stomach.

He gently hands Felix the canteen and slides back under the blankets with him.

Hyunjin had awoken not long ago, but he had heard the sharp intake of breath coming from Felix and Jisung. Chan had stirred next to him

and woken as well. He had been concerned at first, wanting to go and make sure Felix was fine but Hyunjin held him back just as he saw Felix waking Jisung up.

It was interesting to see Jisung like this. Hyunjin had only ever seen him as a caged boy, not daring to let anyone see his true self, or a more vulnerable side of him that had never left Hyunjin's mind.

But here he was, fretting over Felix and almost condoling him. It was nice to see, reassuring even because Hyunjin had begun to worry that Jisung's exclusion from society and human interaction had made and bigger impact on him than what it is turning out to be.

He stilled struggled and even when he lays down with Felix, Hyunjin can see his hesitation, small, but it's there.

Chan shrugs his shoulders and turns back to Hyunjin. "Should we just leave them?" Hyunjin asks him gently. "I do have painkillers, but only for extreme occasions,"

"I think he'll be okay," Chan pats his shoulder and gives him a large smile. "Go back to sleep, give them some time, hey?"

Hyunjin nods and pulls his own blanket higher, but he can't help listening in and if Chan sees the dried tear tracks on his face in the morning, Hyunjin will only smile sadly.

"It feels like I don't even have a heart anymore," Jisung tells him and it is brutally honest. The only thing reminding him that the organ is keeping him alive is the steady rhythm of it in his chest.

Felix drinks slowly, sipping on the warm water. He sends him a soft look, but Jisung doesn't sense pity. Jisung is grateful, however, he thinks he'd pity himself if he were a different person.

"It hurt too much. All the testing, the producers, the drugs, the pain, the loss," He sucks in a deep breath, suddenly squeezing his eyes shut tightly. "It hurt all too much that it just stopped... it reached a peak that I never knew it was capable of reaching and after that... I felt

numb. Everything felt dull, nothing made my heart rate pick up in my chest, I was just a living shell.”

Felix reaches out and holds his hand. His canteen is tucked to his stomach and Jisung guesses it’s nice and warm on the outside, too.

“They wanted to break us, I think. I... I think they wanted to gain as much control over us as possible. You know, to make themselves feel less guilty about using someone their whole life, I think it would’ve comforted them to think they were using up a hollow persons life. Turn us into nothing but wombs,”

“And they succeeded,” Felix croaks out. Jisung sighs deeply. “I guess they did...”

It falls silent for a little bit.

“You’re not hollow now,” Felix then says. His eyes are concerned and Jisung wonders when the veil of concern will finally leave them all. It’s only been barely over a week, but the concern has been evident and Jisung can only guess how much worse it will become.

“No,” Jisung smiles, a gentle tug of the corner of his lips but Felix finds it even in the dark.

“Ever since I saw Minho in the halls, I felt again and now,” Jisung breaths out a small chuckle. “I’ve felt more than I have in a few years in this short span.”

“It’s amazing,” Jisung whispers out. Sleep weighs his eyelids down. The tug is irresistible and his body suddenly feels lighter when he gives in to closing his eyes.

“What is?” Felix’s voice is drifting like his own, thick under the enchantment of sleep.

“Belonging somewhere,” Jisung murmurs, falling into the enchantment.

“Finding a home in people,”



Notes for the Chapter:

i just wanna say... the character development in this fic... i do think its quite a good attribute of this fic heheh

i will just say Hyunjin is such an interesting character too, u gotta give him his chance that he deserves! Everyone in this fic is diverse and they have very deep characteristics that will eventually all get out!! that's one of my favourite things about writing long fics tbh, personal growth and development... sexc

Anyways thank u so so much for giving my shitty little brain fart fic a chance :DDD i love u!!! <33

Also!!! come say hi to me if you have twt i always tweet when i update! and if anyone is interested i also post when some progress sometimes and new fic thingos....!

[my twt!](#)

9. 8→

Jisung wakes Felix with a gentle nudge. The boy stirs but whines and slaps Jisung's hand away.

Jisung had slept like a rock as soon as he fell asleep. There was nothing to keep him up except for the smell of his own clothing that was stiff with dried sweat and the smell of mud. His hair feels wet on the top of his head, damp with oils that have been collecting for too long.

Felix looks exactly how Jisung feels, shiny and his clothes sticking to his skin uncomfortably.

Chan plonks next to Jisung and shakes Felix gently. "Lix, we're going to wash up in the stream, you need to come, too," Jisung perks up at that and thanks Chan silently. Nothing sounds better than washing the built-up grime that's collected over his skin.

Felix wakes, begrudgingly and huffs all the way to the stream.

"How come we haven't broken out the spare clothing sooner?" Jisung asks Changbin who's hauling one of the backpacks down with him. Jisung looks at the backpack in disbelief that they had fit so much extra supplies in just one bag.

"We needed to be far enough away first," Changbin tells him honestly. "And we didn't have enough time to spare to indulge in such luxury," Felix raises his brows and laughs gently.

"So this is like a checkpoint in a way?" Felix asks and Changbin nods. "Sure. If that's how you see it,"

They walk out of the last sprinkling of trees and Jisung breathes in deep.

Nature has reclaimed herself beautifully.

The water is crystal clear and shines with a blue hue and Jisung sees fish swimming around Minho's and Jeongin's legs, the two boys already in the water, still fully clothed. The trees surrounding the

waterhole are thick and green, a perfect coverage and Jisung, who is still a little enthralled by nature after seeing nothing but white walls for seven years lets out a deep sigh, crouching down and letting the tips of his fingers dig into the sand of the bank.

Water laps over his fingers gently and Jisung smiles softly. "If you go to Minhoo, he has leaves that act like soap, so you should get some and clean your clothes with them too," Changbin tells them as he bends down, the bag on the floor as he digs through it, pulling out neatly folded clothing.

"How did you even fit that all in there?" Felix laughs when Changbin keeps on pulling out clothes. "Go ask brainiac over there," he points to Minhoo who flinches as a fish brushes by his leg, falling and the water from his splash covers Jeongin head to toe. The youngest screams loudly and tackles Minhoo in the water, the both of them flailing around in the water.

"Unfortunately, I have no hope at getting all the stuff back in without him," Changbin sighs loudly and Jisung cocks his head to the side. "Minhoo's smart?" He sounds rather surprised and Jisung flushes as soon as he realises his question could be misleading.

Changbin cackles at that. He throws his head back and barks out in laughter. "I know it's really hard to believe," Changbin snorts and he shakes his head. "But he's really smart,"

"Huh," says Felix. "I haven't really interacted that much with him yet."

"He's a good guy. Terribly confusing, but a good person," Changbin smiles at them and Jisung finds himself frowning.

He knows Minhoo is a different character. The way his gaze changes, but how his aura always holds a certain smoulder, even now as he's playing around with Jeongin in the water, Jisung feels as if there's a hidden power hidden deep beneath him. It's pulling Jisung in, but Jisung refuses to gravitate towards it.

Jisung follows Felix blindly into the water, wading through the gentle current towards Minhoo.

Jisung feels a knot form in his stomach, something that feels akin to a hive of bees swarming inside him. There's not a set word Jisung could use to describe the way he feels as he nears the mysterious man.

"Hi!" Felix cheers and Jisung raises a brow at how he can be so happy even when Jisung knows too well about the pains currently plaguing him. Minho waves at them and Jeongin cheers loudly, crashing into Felix to give him a large hug.

"Oh! You're happy today, Innie," Felix pats the taller boy's head who beams down at him. "It feels nice to finally have some fun." He smiles widely, but as he turns to Jisung, it falls a little bit. Jisung is half hiding behind Felix and he tries to smile at the younger, but he's sure it turns out to be more of a grimace than anything.

"Hi..." Jisung waves at him. Jeongin smiles a bit brighter, "I have leaves from Minho if you want them," Jeongin thrusts out his hands filled with leaves and Jisung splutters a bit, hurriedly catching them.

"Just tear them and rub them between your hands!" Jeongin says. "I'll come with you guys too!" Seungmin comes running to them, clearly having trouble running through water and he almost trips a few times if it wasn't for Changbin beside him.

He has a wide smile over his face and even though everyone is drenched and look like grease pits, Jisung hasn't seen them smile so much in one day yet.

"Hey..." Jisung finally moves away from Felix's shadow when Seungmin joins them. "Umm maybe we could go around the bend there," He points where the stream curves around itself. It had occurred to him when Jeongin handed them the leaves that this required a bit more than showing some skin and as he looks over to the other four ten meters away, he squeaks when he finds them peeling their clothes off.

"Woah!" Felix sticks his two thumbs up at Chan, smiling broadly. Chan splutters, covering his chest with his arms and Minho breaks out into cackling laughter when the tips of his ears turn red.

“But sure,” Seungmin shrugs.

“We’re going around the bend,” Felix tells them and he falls into the water, favouring swimming in the hip-deep water instead of trying to trudge through the water.

Everyone follows suit and soon enough, they’re safely concealed by trees and other shrubs.

“We should put the clothes together and clean them all at once,” Jeongin suggests and while that is the most time-saving option—Jisung knows they have to scavenge for things to eat today too—his heart picks up in his chest.

“Naked?” Jisung whispers out and Felix shrugs. “I mean we’re all pretty much in the same boat...” Jisung winces but he nods anyway.

“Okay, but I’m not getting out naked,” Jisung grumbles as he works on unbuttoning his pants. Jisung wasn’t really too nervous to be nude, he had become almost desensitised by the institution’s ways of exposing him almost daily. Jisung doesn’t have to even ask if the others had gone through that, because the answer would be yes and if any of them had a problem with bathing in the nude together, Jisung assumes—hopes—they’d speak up. No one does.

“That’s fine, just don’t get them dirty while they’re wet. And make sure you change once you get out,” Seungmin says as he pulls his shirt over his head.

Jisung feels bare.

Considering they’re butt naked, that’s inevitable, but Jeongin stares at him, no hint of shame across his face, and cocks his head in thought. Jisung sinks further into the water from his hip-deep position.

“Jisung... did they... you know?” The youngest gestures a shape with his hands and it catches the attention of the others.

“Yeah,” Jisung mutters, sinking further into the water. He knows

what Jeongin is asking even without asking. He's thin, almost too thin it's worrying but it's the way his structure differs, the rounded edges of his body that Jisung had slowly accepted as a part of himself over time.

"I was too skinny for them," he tells them. It feels strange, to talk about his experiences and not have to explain in great detail because they understood almost as much as Jisung did himself. And something about that, these boys have gone through the same thing he did feels comforting and even though Jisung has barely spoken to both Seungmin and Jeongin before this, it feels oddly natural.

"For carrying?" Jeongin presses on and Jisung hums. "Hey, guys," Felix's voice is a little sterner than usual. "You shouldn't ask such personal questions without asking first," this brings a smile to Jisung's lips.

"It's okay Felix, they're just as curious as you are," Felix flushes brightly. Jisung had noticed Felix's visible confusion a few times they were laying down together and then his comparing of his own body then his eyes taking Jisung's frame back in.

"You really are tiny, though..." Felix whispers. He's close enough to grasp Jisung's hand and Jisung would've totally been fine with that if they weren't stark naked. "Are you sure they were confident you could even carry a baby?" Jisung stiffens at that.

They had at first after they put the extra weight on for him, they had been more than optimistic.

Jisung, now, wasn't so sure. He had already lost one, but it was the first of what was supposed to be many. Jisung wasn't exactly sure how small he was either until he stood next to the others. Most of them were similar heights, Changbin being closest to his height but he was broad, muscly and Jisung felt like a stick next to him. Chan, too. He was made up with thick muscle around his body. The others were taller than him, shoulders wider and limbs longer. Hyunjin towered over him enough to make him feel slightly intimidated. Jisung knows most of them would be able to snap him in half if they wanted and that's quite an intrusive thought.

“They were,” Jisung answers.

“But not you...?” Seungmin smacks Jeongin hard on his arm. He yelps and pouts at him. Jisung sinks even further into the water as if it’s concealing him.

“Mmmh, not really... it’s a bit complicated,” He swallows thickly, feeling as if a stone has been suddenly gotten lodged in his throat. “And I’m not quite ready to talk about it...”

Jisung thinks he’ll never be ready to share that part of his life with anyone.

→

Jisung feels like a brand new person now in new clothes and his hair still wet from their wash in the stream.

“Hey Sungie, maybe you should try a smaller shirt?” Felix giggles at him and Jisung whines, pawing at him with his hands that have been eaten by the fabric of his too-large shirt. “Chan said this one was the smallest out of the dry clothes! Besides, it’s actually really comfy,”

Felix just shakes his head at him. His own shirt was baggy on him, but Felix's fingers poke out of the long sleeves whereas Jisung's don't quite make it.

Seungmin snorts at him too and Jisung feels himself blush when he takes his hands and rolls up the sleeves for him. Seungmin pats his wrists and gives him a smile. “There,”

“Thanks,” Jisung tries to give him a smile back.

“Alrighty!” Chan cheers and gestures for them the huddle closer to him. “So as everyone knows, we’re running low on food. But Minho

and I looked around a bit before and it seems like it's a good place to scavenge and hunt. So! Teams!"

"We need someone to stay here and prepare the fire and things for cooking, and teams to collect and someone to go with Minhø to hunt... Jisung do you want to go?" All eyes pan over him and Minhø's gaze is darkened again, but he's smiling softly. Jisung gulps.

"I umm... was wondering if I could collect instead...?" His voice is small and he feels as if he's shrinking underneath all their eyes.

"Oh," Minhø breathes out. "I taught Seungmin last time, he should be good to go with,"

"Then that's settled!" Seungmin cheers and he links his and Jisung's arm together. Jisung stiffens at first but relaxes in the hold, realising it too is awfully comforting, just how Felix's small, warm hands felt against his skin.

Human touch feels warm, and it sends a sudden spark through his body that warms his insides and creates a feeling of sedation. Jisung was only used to cold gloved hands, prying him open and pulling at his soft skin. But the gentleness these boys treat him with makes him feel... safe.

And the sudden thought causes Jisung's eyes to well with tears.

He's lucky that it's just he and Seungmin now, wandering around the forest, pulling up different plants and picking different fruits from low and high hanging plants.

But Seungmin notices and he drops his bag of berries he was collecting from the bush and hurries over, grabbing Jisung's hands and inspecting them for any wounds.

"I'm fine," Jisung croaks out. He steals his hands away and wipes the tears away. "I don't know why I just got emotional then..."

"Oh," Seungmin then smiles at him, obviously glad no harm had been done to Jisung. "It's okay. I get emotional when my cycles are nearing... Maybe it's almost time?"

“Maybe,” Jisung nods, thinking it’s a very likely idea.

“You know being rescued at the time that we did saved me from getting pregnant,” Seungmin says after a brief amount of silence. He’s back plucking berries and Jisung is digging for root vegetables again.

Jisung looks at him and he finds Seungmin’s lips in a thin line, his brows furrowed. “You didn’t want it either?”

Seungmin hums and shakes his head. “After realising what the circumstances were I never wanted anything more than to get out,”

“And here you are,” Jisung says. Seungmin sends him a warm smile.

“What about you? I know you were the longest residing person there?”

Jisung only hums. “Of course I was close. A few times.”

Seungmin raises his eyebrows. “And you got out of it?”

Jisung stills for a few seconds before he hums gently. “I guess you could say that.” Seungmin doesn’t push for an explanation and the ball of nerves threatening to unravel inside Jisung’s belly slowly fades away until there’s nothing but a subtle warmth.

→

Jisung perks up when he hears leaves crunching under footsteps and is suddenly meeting eyes with Minho. His head cocks to the side and he slowly takes him in. Jisung shuffles a bit but doesn’t move away. Minho does intimidate him, he makes him hyperaware of everything going on around him and when Minho’s around him, it’s like the air stills, it is useless to breathe and time flows differently. Minho

demands attention even when he is doing so little as breathing.

Jisung gulps and tears his eyes away from him just as Jeongin tumbles into the small clearing, three rabbits in his grasp.

Jisung can feel Minho staring at his back and he knows he's walking towards him by the crunch of the leaves, but Jisung allows him to advance on him until he's sitting right beside him and he pulls the bag of foraged goods closer to him and works at removing the inedible parts with Jisung.

"Thank you," Jisung whispers to him and all he gets in return is a small smile and a stare full of unspoken wonder.

→

When Jisung's eyes peel open to see nothing but darkness that night, he panics at first.

But a voice fills his ears, so soft he barely hears it, but he does and when he follows it, he finds Chan awake and poking at the dying embers of the fire.

He rubs his eyes once to rid of the sleep crusting his eyes shut and then twice to rub away the nightmares that clung to his eyelids.

"Jisung?" Chan whispers out. Jisung clutches at his blanket and gently stands. Felix mumbles in his sleep but doesn't wake. Jisung takes the chance to hurry out of Felix's zone and allows Chan to help him make himself comfortable next to him.

"Did you have a nightmare?" Chan asks him softly and Jisung hangs his head, nodding. Chan hums gently and reaches out his hand, "Can I touch you?" And Jisung pauses and stares into the eldest's eyes, shocked that he had even asked him. Jisung nods.

Jisung doesn't remember a time where anyone had asked for his consent. It feels good, to finally have a say. Jisung feels that out here, in the middle of nowhere on a journey to find freedom and safety, he feels the most alive he has ever felt.

A warm trickle eases its way into his heart and it stays, warming him up.

Chan's hand gently rubs circles against Jisung's back and Jisung finds himself leaning into the touch.

"When I have nightmares I always like to drink something warm," Chan tells him as he hands him warm water in a canteen. "It makes me feel safe," Jisung takes a sip and it eases his nerves and helps the blurry feeling of his eyes settle. Jisung does feel safe now.

It had been almost two weeks now, and compared to the first few days when Jisung was even wary of Felix, he feels like a different person.

He had only known how to glare at people, flinch from their touch, but now here he was today, leaning into the touch of others he had once been wary of.

"Do you have nightmares a lot?" Jisung finds himself asking. "Hmmm, I guess so? Not every night, but they're pretty persistent things," He faces Jisung and gives him one of those soft smiles. "Are yours bad at the moment?"

"Yeah. They always happened every night in the facility and when we first broke out they disappeared for a bit. Maybe it was the sudden change of physical activity that wore me out too much, but I thought my nightmares only came while I was in the facility, but now it turns out no matter where I go, they'll follow me,"

Chan sighs. "The worst things are always the things that follow you around," Jisung nods and rests his head on his hand, staring at the fire that Chan had just fed. It's flames grow again and engulf the wood, licking at its fuel growing hotter and brighter.

"My mother went insane," Chan suddenly says and Jisung looks at

him with raised eyebrows. "You don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to," Jisung tells him but Chan just shakes his head. "It's fine. It was a long time ago now,"

"Well, you already know my story," Jisung mutters after they fall into silence for a bit.

Chan scratches at his head. "Yeah, I do... I wish I could've helped you sooner,"

"When my mother died after she lost the plot Minho's family took me in. We were always friends, so it wasn't a major adjustment I had to make, but I still escaped with him into the wild and that's where our knowledge comes from. We did it twice. For months at a time."

Jisung adjusts his body and shuffles closer to Chan, enough so their thighs touch. Neither of them makes a move to slide away.

"I was every aware as a kid what was happening to the world and it scared me a lot. But it never sat right with me, the facility. I always had that kid with the chubby cheeks at the back of my mind—you." He stares into Jisung's eyes. "I grew angry and I developed a sudden need to vent and become strong because one day I knew I was going to help you if nobody beat me to it."

Chan opens up to Jisung in the middle of a soundless night. Jisung sits and watches, listening to Chan's story and gapes when he finds out how devoted these four boys had been to rescue him and the other three boys. Jisung is speechless and the only thing he can do is tackle Chan into a hug.

Chan hugs him back and doesn't say anything about it.

"Maybe we created our own little revolution," Chan then muses and Jisung cocks his head at him. "Oh, you don't know the meaning?"

"I lived in the slums," Jisung reminds him. Chan instantly understands and just gives him a smile before he explains to him, "It's like a forcible movement to change something in power, usually the government system or something like that,"

Jisung suddenly perks up. He angles his body so Chan can look at him easier and he leans in, voice quiet and eyes wide.

“So has it happened before? Revolutions?”

“Oh, plenty!” Chan nods, smiling and showing teeth. “There’s been too many to count, but recently they’ve become less frequent,”

“But do you think what you did was a revolt?” Jisung’s voice grows slightly louder and he talks faster and Chan senses his excitement easily. Chan frowns.

“Umm...”

“You broke out four boys that were supposed to ‘fix’ the world crisis,” Jisung whispers, smiling. Chan’s face falls again.

“Oh,” He says. “Oh,” Chan bites on his lip nervously. “I guess we did?”

Jisung notices his apprehension and frowns at Chan. “You think that’s a bad thing?” Chan shakes his head. “No I don’t, but the start of revolutions usually meant that something worse was on its way, some type of defensive move from the opposing side,”

“But we’re running away from that?” Jisung says.

“We are,” Chan assures him but his gaze drops. “But it never quite clicked that what we did wasn’t just a small breakout...”

Jisung blinks at him. “Before I jumped off the wall,” he begins to say. Chan looks back up at him. “I thought about my options. My decision was obviously this, but I knew as soon as I jumped humanity would fall,”

Chan swallows thickly. “Do you think that disease is really everywhere?” Jisung shrugs. “I don’t see why it can’t be when it mysteriously appeared here anyway. But Minho told me that the government refuses to interact with other settlements. So, there’s no way they’d actually reach out to find that out or try to hunt us down, right?”

Chan bites on his bottom lip. "It was to prevent war. To not speak to each other and ignore the other's existence meant peace... I don't know if they're that desperate to break the centuries-old law, but perhaps if what you said... the end of humanity," Chan shrugs his shoulders and forces a smile back on his face.

"We shouldn't worry about these things. They're probably highly unlikely to happen." Jisung sees right through Chan. He can see how his words had worried him and Jisung wants to slap himself at putting such a dangerous idea into Chan's mind. "Okay," Jisung whispers softly.

Felix then lets out a small cry and Jisung perks up. Chan does too, but when Felix cries out once more, Jisung gestures for him to stay. "Go to sleep," he tells him. "I'll take care of him," Chan tries to argue but Jisung shakes his head.

"Is it that bad?" He whispers and his eyes are shining with worry and dread.

Jisung hums. "It's always worse at night," he mutters before making his way over to a whining Felix.

Chan watches for a few minutes, only settling to rest when Jisung lays next to Felix and starts humming a tune of a song Chan has only heard once in his life.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone!!! Im so so happy that you guys are enjoying this fic hehehe pls bear with me through the chapters i know I've said this a lot but when i say slow burn id just like to let u know that on the document where I've planned this fic out, slow burn is in caps, bold and a font size 20 instead of my usual 11 lol

have a good week, i love u all!! <33333

my twt!

10. 9→

Notes for the Chapter:

Slightly graphic injury! and blood in this chapter!!

Jisung's feet are throbbing.

Each step he takes it sends a shockwave of busing pain up his feet and into his legs. They have been walking for a whole day straight, the only breaks were to eat and now as the sun has disappeared from the sky, Jisung is more than agitated, waiting for someone to finally ask for a rest.

Jisung wasn't about to ask himself though. Two weeks ago it had been Felix who had been the one asking for breaks and everyone complied easily while Felix struggled through but as soon as the cramps had left him, they were pushing harder and harder and Jisung, who has been struggling to even keep his eyes open during the long treacherous walks had asked for many breaks over the past week and he could sense the annoyance that they tried so hard to hide. Jisung has stopped them too many times over the past month they've been together, and he wasn't ready to test their fragile bond, so he stays quiet and ignores the blistering pain and continues on.

It seems like it's hours later when they finally call for a rest.

Jisung collapses as soon as the words fill his ears and the only thing he can hear is the scream from Felix and Seungmin as he goes limp.



When Jisung finally comes to, the night is deep and the sound of cicadas chirping fills the night's silence. The fire is crackling nearby and then voices finally fill his ears. His head is placed in someone's lap with someone's hand is sprawled out on his stomach, and another on his forehead.

Jisung peels his eyes open and glares as soon as he sees Hyunjin hovering above him.

“Oh thank goodness,” Hyunjin breathes out a sigh of relief and falls back, his butt colliding with the ground as he groans. “He must be fine if he can glare at you,” Minho muses and Hyunjin shoots the elder his own glare, which Minho returns back. Jisung tries to sit up, but the hand on his stomach pushes with light force and when he looks up, he locks eyes with Minho. He’s frowning softly and Jisung continues to look up at him like a fool because, god, Minho is handsome.

His eyes are shiny, the fires light reflecting in the dark orbs, but they’re deep and full of unlocked secrets.

Secrets that Jisung isn’t quite sure if he ever wants to unlock. Minho is shrouded in layers of mystery, facades that can fool anyone, but Jisung has his own facade and he sees right through them, leaving only a dark cloud of mist around the man.

Jisung is confused.

He would think Minho is a rather cold person, but with the corners of his pink mouth turning up and his lap underneath Jisung's head and the warm palm pressing into his abdomen, Jisung thinks it's just another mask.

“Why can't I move?” He asks with a frown and Minho only laughs. Jisung frowns. He's growing more uncomfortable as time goes on, why hadn't he woken in Felix's lap, or Seungmin or Chan's for goodness sakes?

“You just passed out?” Minho says and he stares at him with a funny look.

“Yeah, whatever. Can I please get up now?”

“No you idiot,” Hyunjin comes closer to Jisung and frowns. Jisung huffs and shuffles awkwardly in Minho's hold. Really, it's starting to become too uncomfortable for Jisung to bear.

“Didn't you hear what Minho said? You passed out,”

“I was tired!” Jisung yells and this time, he rolls out of Minho's grip. He doesn't reach back out for him. Instead, Hyunjin clutches onto his arm and Jisung hisses at him, shaking his grip off as he wanders over to Felix who's watching him with weary eyes.

“Sung,” Felix says when he sits down next to him. Jisung rests his

head on his hand, his arm propped up by his knee and hums as he looks at his friend. "You really should listen to Hyunjin... you just collapsed."

"I'm fine, Felix," Jisung stresses out. "Really, I was just tired, okay? I'm gonna go back to sleep, I'm still tired,"

Felix only stares at him with a knot between his brows.

"Okay," He whispers softly.

→

"You have something on your mind," Felix says, sifting closer to Chan. The elder looks up from the fire and gives him a smile. "Yeah," he admits and Felix gives him a gentle pat on his thigh and offers him his own bright smile.

"You're the closest with Jisung at the moment," The look on Chan's face suddenly turns a little more serious and Felix straightens up, nodding. "Has he said anything about... about a revolt?"

Felix stares at Chan, his eyes wider than usual and his lips parted.

“A revolt?” Felix hisses under his breath. “He even knows what a revolt is? I thought he never had an education—“

“I told him two weeks ago,” Chan mumbles back. Felix shakes his head. “He hasn’t said anything—“ Chan deflates a bit, “But what’s on *your* mind?”

Chan breathes in deep, closing his eyes. “I think we started something bigger than we initially thought,” Felix blinks and then his eyes go wide and he sucks in a breath. “Chan, you can’t think that this is suddenly going to go south?”

Chan shakes head. “I don’t know,” He groans. “I think we’ll be fine, but something about it is putting me on edge,”

“Hey! Come eat some food!” Minho shouts to them from a few meters away. “Can you wake Jisung?” Chan whispers to Felix. The younger boy nods and his looks into Chan's eyes and gives him another smile.

“We’ll be fine. This one move will have probably caused enough damage than a large revolt anyway,”

There’s something strangely comforting about that thought.

→

Jisung learns throughout the week that when the plague of tiredness falls over you, it doesn't leave so easily.

After his fainting spell last week, the group had been on high alert and Jisung had already snapped at both Hyunjin who was adamant to check him over— Jisung had blown up over it and had cried in the forest again until Felix trudged over and brought him back to warm up by the fire— and Changbin who had forced him to sit down after catching him swaying hazardingly.

“Stop touching me!” Jisung screams and he flings his hands out, pushing Changbin from his side after he catching him around the waist after he stumbled on a rock.

Everyone turns to look at him and he fumes. He breathes in a deep breath, his chest rising and falling slowly with his controlled breathing.

“Would everyone stop treating me like I'm going to fall and die at any point!”

“We're just trying to look out for you,” Chan tells him but Jisung just groans. “For the twentieth time, *I'm fine* ,”

“Maybe you could say that when you can stop tripping over your own feet and sleeping as soon as we set up camp,”

“Isn’t that what the camp is for?” Jisung sneers at Changbin. “You haven’t even been eating!” Hyunjin cries out. “That’s why you’re so lethargic now! Jisung, this is a straining time for your body, you need to take care of yourself.”

“And I feel that I need to sleep!” He cries.

“Hey!” Chan shouts. He’s frowning and he looks mad, something Jisung has yet to see. His voice is booming loud, and everything falls quiet around him.

“Everyone needs to calm down,” he tells him. “We’re going to set up camp here,” The area is thick with shrubs and trees and Jisung spots a pond nearby. It’s hotter here, the air is humid and the heat is eating away at Jisung’s last patience and making him even more lightheaded.

“And Jisung,” His eyes narrow at him. “You’re going to eat and then sleep and you’re not going to argue with everyone trying to help you,”

“I don’t need help—“

“Don’t argue,” Chan growls at him and the tone he uses on him makes Jisung halt and stare at him before he nods, completely useless against the eldest.

“Now go and gather food. We’ll meet at the base fire when you have enough for us all,”

“Who’s with who?” Hyunjin asks and Chan shrugs.

“I’m going with Minho,” Jisung grunts out grabbing the older man by his collar and pulling him away. Minho lets out a strangled noise of surprise but allows Jisung to drag him away.

“Why not Felix?”

“Because I don’t want to be stared at with such sympathy right now!” He yells back as they disappear into the bushes.

“And what makes you think I won’t stare at you with ‘such sympathy’?” Minho chuckles, clearly mocking him.

Jisung places his hands on his hips and sends him a glare. “I’ve noticed you’re quite a dick,”

“Oh wow,” Minho scoffs and pauses for a brief moment before he nods his head in understanding. “You’re right,”

Jisung makes a noise of satisfaction and then points to the weapon slung around Minho’s chest. “Do you think we will find anything?”

“To hunt?” Minho raises a brow at him, cocking his head. “I mean I

guess so. There is usually plenty in the wild since no humans come out here,”

“Shouldn’t it be a lot more dangerous, then?” Jisung mumbles. “To think we haven’t run into trouble with anything other than ourselves,”

“You gotta admit it’s always you that makes the trouble,” Minho counters swiftly and Jisung sends him a glare. “I was cooped up for seven years, anyone would have trouble with this if they only got half an hour of walking not even every day,”

Minho winces. “Oh... yeah of course... But regarding your previous question, maybe we’re just lucky?”

Jisung screws up his nose and shakes his head. “Not with me around, no one should be lucky,”

“Oh come on, you’re such a pessimist,” Minho pokes him in the shoulder and the younger boy glares at him. “And stop looking at everyone like that, it makes me want to either punch you or hide,”

“There’s only one right answer,” Jisung tells him and Minho smirks, shaking his fist in front of Jisung who snarls at him.

“You are one feisty little thing,” Minho scoffs and Jisung groans. “I am not little!”

“Alright then...” Minho raises a brow and with one last shrug, he wanders further into the dense vegetation. Jisung follows him blindly, keeping his eyes trained on the unstable ground. “Hold onto my shirt,” Minho mutters when he notices him struggling to keep his

eyes both on the ground and where Minho is going.

His hand reaches out, fingertips clasp onto the hem of the elder's shirt. "If I find a berry bush, should I pick some?" Jisung asks him. Minho is stalking through the trees, his footsteps quiet and he tenses when Jisung talks. "Whatever," He hisses out. "Just make sure you're quiet enough. I don't want to scare away prey,"

Jisung shuts up after that and tries to tread lighter through the mess of nature.

Minho points across from where they're currently standing and Jisung follows the line of his finger and finds a mess of blackberry bushes. Jisung's eyes light up and Minho gives him a small smile and Jisung softly manoeuvres through the thick shrub to get to the berries.

Minho continues on without him, gently whispering not to follow him and to stay where he is. Jisung doesn't fight it, instead, he plucks juicy berries off their bush, trying to dodge the prickly stems, and dropping the dark berries into his pulled out shirt.

It takes some time to fill his shirt with berries, but when he's close to plucking them all off, his fingers now drenched in dark juice that drips down onto the earth beneath him, a loud noise fills his ears and he yelps loudly.

His foot rolls and he falls. He loses most of the berries from his shirt

when he stumbles, and blindly reaches out to grab at anything to keep him falling. The brambles on the blackberry bush cuts through his flesh, piercing his hand and Jisung cries out. He falls to his knees and the impact of his body falling drags the sharp plant through the soft flesh on his hand.

Tears prick in his eyes and he whimpers out loudly, but he doesn't dare to move.

He stays kneeling on the soft earth, crying at the searing pain. Blood is flowing down his hand, streaming down his arm and dripping at his bent elbow.

His head turns when he hears footsteps along with the rustling of leaves. Minho comes out through the bushes, holding a chicken in his left hand. He's smiling when Jisung first sees him, but as soon as Minho looks in his direction, his face falls and he drops the pheasant to the ground, scurrying over to him.

"Shit, Jisung what did you do?" Minho squats next to him, pulling out the knife at his waist.

"I fell," he mutters out, wiping his tears with his uninjured hand. "And I grabbed it like an idiot,"

Minho's eyes widen when he notices the boy's arm drenched in blood. "Oh fuck, that's a lot of blood," Jisung winces and nausea spins his head. He takes in deep breathes and winces when Minho's fingers land on his hand. Panic fills him with flashes of sudden heat, the churn of his stomach and Jisung whines out low, ripping his eyes

away from the mess of red that is causing him to suddenly spiral down.

“Can I pull it out?”

“God, if you can,” Jisung answers with a pained hiss. “Okay, but it’s gonna hurt, you can squeeze my sho—“

Jisung screams profanities at the top of his lungs.

→

“Is anyone actually skilled in fishing?” Hyunjin mumbles. The two others with him, Felix and Chan turn back to him and shrug their shoulders. Hyunjin only grimaces.

“How hard can it be?” Chan asks him as he wades into the water and Hyunjin groans.

“Fish are slippery, and they’re fast swimmers, so it’ll be hard to catch them! Right, Felix—“

Hyunjin's mouth falls open when Felix emerges from the water, a fish in his hand while smiling like a fool. Chan follows not even a few seconds later, his own hands curled tightly around a large fish.

“Forget it,” Hyunjin grumbles as Chan throws him his fish. “I forgot you’re like, good at everything,”

Felix looks towards Chan who sends him a bashful smile, snatching the nape of his neck. “You guys continue on then,” Hyunjin shoos them back into the water. “I’ll prepare them, then,”

It only takes the duo twenty minutes to have enough fish to feed everyone well.

Chan had originally thought Hyunjin would struggle with deboning the fish and preparing it to eat, but it turned out that Hyunjin didn’t just know how to operate on humans, but on fish as well. Felix, however, struggled and instead sat and watched, but his eyes distant.

“I’m worried,” Felix says suddenly. Chan takes his eyes off of the last fish he was preparing and looks at the younger man, cocking his head. Felix’s eyes flicker to Chan’s before he averts his gaze to his lap. “About Jisung...” he elaborates. He’s playing with his fingers in his lap, clearly nervous, but he looks up to meet both of the others gazes.

“Have you noticed changes to?” Hyunjin shuffles a little closer. He had noticed major changes in the boy, too.

“I mean I know we haven’t known each other for that long, but he wasn’t so... wasn’t so,”

“He wasn’t so clumsy, so tired, so snappy?”

Felix screws his nose up at the last part. “Right,” Hyunjin murmurs. “He’s always been snappy,”

“But yes! I mean maybe this really has taken a toll on him, but something feels off... there’s something not right. All of us walk the same distance, us three were locked up for some time too, but we aren’t collapsing as soon as possible, avoiding food,” Felix’s voice heightens in distress. “I’m really worried...”

“I think,” Chan sighs loudly. “Hyunjin maybe you should confront him,”

“Me?” The boy shrieks. His eyes are wide and he nods his head furiously. “He’ll rip my head off! Chan, why can’t you do it instead, he’s growing to like you! Or Felix! He actually likes Felix!” Hyunjin whines loudly, the protest loud and clear but Chan shakes his head.

“First of all, you’re the doctor, not Felix or me and secondly, as much as he might despise you, you’ve known him the longest.”

Hyunjin sighs dramatically. “But if he does get really mad come back and I’ll try to talk to him instead,” Felix pats Hyunjin on the arm.

“Do you have any idea that it might be? Did anything happen in the institution before we rescued you guys?” Chan shots his question out to Felix who hums, shaking his head. “I don’t know...”

“Hyunjin?” Chan’s eyes slide over to the taller male and when he

sees his face whitening, the young doctor's fingers trembling, Chan gulps.

“What do you know?”

Hyunjin shakes his head, licking his dry lips. “I think I know.” He murmurs lowly. He lifts his head and nods. “I’m pretty sure I know, but this... this is going to change a lot... god...”

Felix and Chan can only share a worried look between each other.

→

Around the fire, Felix jumps up from Chan's side suddenly when he spots Jisung and Minho wandering back into the newly set up camp.

Felix wouldn't have sprung up so fast, or gotten up at all if it weren't for the look on Jisung's face and the blood clinging to his arm. A closer inspection, Felix can see Minho's hand tightly holding onto a bloodied hand. Jisung is wincing and his eyes are red, clear tear tracks down his cheeks.

“Sungie!” He cries out. The boy looks at him and Felix takes a breather when Jisung meets his gaze and immediately bursts out into tears once more. Minho looks as equally as confused.

“What did he do this time?” Hyunjin sighs, taking the injured hand into his two much larger hands. Jisung is sniffing, whimpering into Felix's shoulder while Minho sits just behind the distressed boy.

“He fell and grabbed a blackberry bush to try to save himself,” Hyunjin winces and nods. “This is gonna hurt, Jisung so I suggest you try to find a comfortable position—“

Minho lets out a loud ‘oomph’ as Jisung's elbow shoves into his stomach, the boys head-smashing down onto his shoulder. “Hey! Don’t bite me aga— HEY!”

Hyunjin watches Jisung's sleeping form. He’s tucked as close as he could possibly get to Felix’s chest, sleeping soundly with the occasional whine drifting from his barely parted lips.

Hyunjin had barely succeeded in forcing Jisung to eat after fixing his wound. He had tried to curl up to Felix as soon as they were done and Chan had to peel him away from his friend to even get him to open his eyes. Needless to say, Chan’s arm is stuck around Jisung's tiny waist, his back pressed against Felix. Jisung has a tight grip on

the eldest's hand, even in sleep.

Hyunjin sighs loudly, pulling his own blanket over him and cuddling up to Jeongin who's looking up at him with a small smile, dark eyes sparkly. He tucks the youngest close to his chest and sighs happily at the warmth.

His questioning would have to wait until morning.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HEY SO i just wanna say thank you for all ur support and all the kind comments omg i know so many of you are actually enjoying the story itself and omg that makes me so so happy really!!

also I'm up to chapter 15 now so i have quite a lot still up my sleeve and honestly this chapter isn't quite full on so ill post it before update day so you guys have a more satisfying read on Sunday!! this chapter still has relationship development and character development so its still important ! i hope you guys enjoyed!!

[my twt!](#)

11. 10→

“We should head off again,” Chan says. He’s just finished sharpening his knife that he used the night prior with the fish and is studying the sharp edge carefully. He deems it good enough and slides it back in the sheath by his hip.

“Down the mountain?” Jeongin questions. His hair is sticking up in different directions and Hyunjin reaches out to try to soothe down the dark locks.

“Yeah, it’s about time we got moving again. We don’t want anyone catching up on us,”

“You think they are?” Jeongin asks, nervous. Chan just shrugs. “We can never be sure about these things,”

“So pack up now?” Seungmin asks and Chan nods. “But, since we only got fish and a chicken last night, let’s split up and look for food on our way down. Meet at the lake at the bottom by noon?”

Jisung eyes Felix who gives him a little glare. Jisung pouts, still nursing his injured hand to his chest. “Why won’t you go with me instead?” He whines, shuffling closer to Felix but he huffs.

“You kept me awake all night with your stupid panting!” Jisung looks at him with wide eyes and then pouts again. “I’m sorry,” he murmurs. “But I wanna go with you, you make me feel the comfiest...” Felix sighs and shakes his head. “I know, Sung, but you can’t just stay with me this whole time. You need to trust the others eventually... we’re a team now. A family,”

Jisung grunts. “A very dysfunctional family,”

Felix winces. “What’s a family without the... dysfunction?”

“I can go with you,” Hyunjin is looking down at him and Jisung just scoffs. “Do I get paid?” Hyunjin’s face falls then hardens into a frown. “No. And I’m not that bad,”

“You don’t get to decide that,” Jisung murmurs, waking away from the medic who looks at Felix, crestfallen. “He’ll come around one day,”

Hyunjin shakes his head. “Not if I’m going shatter his world,” Hyunjin whispers. Felix hears him but he just bites down on his lip.

Jisung stops in front of Minho who’s packing the blankets into a bag.

“Again?” Minho raises a brow at him. “Really?” Jisung hums and Minho sighs and nods. “Okay, but you still haven’t apologised for biting me. *Twice*,”

“Sorry,” Jisung hurries out and Minho sighs, knowing well that Jisung hadn’t meant that as much as Minho had hoped. “We could get another chicken or something,” Jisung mutters as Minho slings the bag over his own back. The elder nods his head. “There were quite a few,”

“Can we head off now?” Minho calls out to Chan. They get a thumbs

up in return.

Minho and Jisung are the first to set out.

“I am not going near another one of those,” Jisung shivers when Minho spots large blackberry bushes. “Fair enough,” Minho shrugs. “But it’s food, so you can hold the bag open with one hand while I pick some, then,”

Jisung grumbles, but he still ends up with blackberry juices on his hand, Minho's aim a little off sometimes.

Jisung had tried to fight the urge to figure out Minho. He had tried to keep distance, watch him from afar instead of following him blindly, but here he was giving in to the temptation that Minho oozed.

He watches, admiring his profile for a while, wondering why his dark shiny eyes held so much mystery. Chan had said Minho was a rather normal kid, but Jisung falters in his gaze, mixed between hunger of a predator and this fond softness that eases Jisung's frayed edges.

Minho feels like a threat, but he feels like a warm blanket at the same time.

“You’re staring,” Minho states boldly and Jisung hums, not even bothering covering up his actions. “I was just thinking,” Jisung tells him honestly. Minho turns and looks down at him, raising an

eyebrow and it's strangely threatening. Jisung feels a burst of heat fill his heart, erupting over his body.

Jisung thinks back to the first time he met Minho, he had been too high on adrenaline to even look over him enough, but now, there's golden light flooding in from the canopy and Jisung cannot help but stare, even when Minho locks eyes with him.

He stares and stares and Minho stares back, unwavering.

"Do you think it's almost noon?" Jisung breathes out, finally breaking the warming stare.

"Didn't you want to hunt?"

"I did, but—" A sudden deep roaring growl rips out of nowhere and Minho frowns, cocking his head at Jisung.

"What the hell was that?" It comes again and Jisung stands abruptly, pulling the bag with one hand. Minho takes it from him and slings it over his shoulders. "I don't know," the elder mumbles. "Whatever it is, it doesn't sound good," he grips onto Jisung's good hand and begins to pull him out of the trees, though the scrubs— all while the noises become louder and much more frequent— until they're suddenly at a cliff's edge.

Jisung can see the others already down the mountain, past the lake, all unharmed but looking weary.

He then hears Minho gasp from his side and his grip tightens around him involuntarily. Jisung frowns and he turns to look back, convinced something is going on.

When he does, his stomach drops and a small scream leaves his lips.

Dust. There's dust everywhere and with another sudden roar, Jisung suddenly discovers it is the earth making the deep growls that reverberate through him.

A landslide.

His heart rate picks up in his chest and then he looks to Minho, fear evident on his face. Minho isn't much better. He's trembling and holding Jisung so tight it hurts.

The sudden rumble startles Jisung.

He looks over the edge of the mountains cliff and a scared squeal leaves his lips when he sees the drop. The other six are down there, waving to them, screaming at them to come down, all drenched in water from their swim after climbing down the small mountain.

But Jisung's mind is pulling him in too many directions, he pauses to

look back, a horrified noise escaping him.

Crumbling earth is roaring down the mountain, coming straight towards them.

Jisung takes an uncalculated step backwards.

His foot lands on a rock and his ankle rolls, causing him to stumble and just as he goes to yell out, there's an arm circling around his thin waist, pulling him flush to a larger chest. His fingers grip onto Minho's shirt, his eyes tightly shut and his cheek pushed against the taller's shoulder.

"Jisung," Minho's voice is steady, his mouth right by his ear. His warm breath tickles against his cool skin. "You've got to trust me right now,"

Reality suddenly slaps Jisung across the face and he pulls away from Minho's grip. The elder boy's arm slips from his waist and he takes a few steps backwards, glaring at the elder. He frowns through his glare when he sees Minho's own narrowed eyes. "Don't touch me like that," He begins but the roar of the earth cascade is growing louder and he sees how Minho jumps on the balls of his feet, antsy.

"I don't care if you hate me after this," Minho growls and Jisung startles when his hands clasp around his waist, pulling him flush to his body again. The warmth of his body radiates through their clothing almost as soon as they touch. His hold is tight around him and Jisung feels himself tense, looking up at the elder. His eyes are smouldering and Jisung feels a groan of anger bubble up his throat.

Minho is quicker than him and one hand travels down, past his hip and hooking at his thigh, gripping him tightly.

Jisung yelps out. “Put your arms around my neck!” He has to yell over the storm of earth and in his fit of panic, Jisung listens.

“I’m not gonna let you get hurt,” Minho then promises a soft tone, but it’s unwavering, strong and Jisung feels strangely safe at this moment, with earth roaring behind them, greedy to eat them up. Minho's arms are warm, comforting even.

And just as Jisung is as close as he can possibly get, his face tucked into his neck, Minho runs, Jisung's feet dragging against the rumbling earth until there’s nothing under his feet.

Minho throws them both off the mountain.

There’s nothing around them but air. Jisung screams loudly as Minho gasps loudly in his ear, his breathing shuddering before he breaks out into a loud cry. His hands tighten around his grip on Jisung's body and the smaller male grabs onto anything his hands can purchase on.

Minho's grip is vice-like and Jisung knows there will be bruises on his body after this, telling the story of desperation.

The hand that had been tightly gripping onto his waist suddenly disappears, a hand now cradling his head and just as he registers the touch, his body is plunged into coldness.

He feels Minho's grip on him slip away as they sink further down, but the adrenaline in his body has caused a crash to his system and all Jisung can hope is that the people he's been with for the past month care enough to save them.

Just as Jisung feels his breath being robbed from him, a large hand grips around his arm and forcibly pulls him upwards.

As his head breaks through the surface, he's tucked to a bare chest, an arm underneath his knees.

Jisung sucks in air, greedily breathing in air to his lungs and when he finally looks up, he's met with Hyunjin's concerned face. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Chan helping Minho back to the shoreline, his friend half draped over his back.

"You're crazy!" Hyunjin shouts towards Minho just as Jisung scrambles from his grip. "You could've gotten the both of you killed!"

Felix is by Jisung's side almost as soon as he falls to the ground, still gasping for air. Hyunjin is running over to Minho and Changbin

growls out when he pushes Minho's shoulder, shoving him backwards.

“Excuse you!” Minho shouts back, giving him a deadly glare. “If it wasn’t for me he’d be up there,” he gestures to where the larger mountain has collapsed, covering the cliff in debris, “he would be dead! You should be thanking me!”

Felix pats Jisung's back, helping him sit up. “Are you okay?” He asks softly and all Jisung can do is let out a small whimper, throwing his head back. “Everything hurts,” he shudders out. His skin is stinging, the force of his body hitting the water had felt like thousands of pinpricks, needles like he regularly was poked with back in the institution.

Jisung breathes out heavily as Felix runs his hands over his back, trying to help with the stinging. It soothes it a little, the warm comforting.

“Look, everyone's okay now, but if you guys are done fighting maybe we should run from the landslide?” It’s Jeongin who’s shouting at them. The younger boy had lived in the shadows of the elder boys for a while and had recently found his voice, slithering out of his shell with a force that Jisung was surprised such a sweet-looking kid could have.

Jisung admired that.

And that's all it takes for them to be on their feet, running from the downfall of dust that falls, just barely missing the lake.

→

Hyunjin stares.

He stares until Felix lifts a brow at him, questioning the depth of his stare and why he hasn't come and confronted Jisung yet.

Mostly, Hyunjin is shit scared about even facing Jisung, and now after he's been through a rather rough day, Hyunjin would rather stay clear of him altogether.

But it's the lingering nagging in his mind that wills him to get up and silently offer a hand to Jisung.

He frowns but when Hyunjin persists, he rolls his eyes and gets up, not bothering with putting his much smaller palm into the taller own.

Hyunjin's fist curls around nothing but air.

He leads Jisung away a fair bit, enough to be out of earshot and away

from the eyes of the others, but close enough to still hear the muffled conversations of their brood through the thick scrubs.

He stops suddenly and Jisung halts, almost crashing into his back. He takes a step back as Hyunjin turns to face him.

The taller's mind is going a hundred miles per hour, scurrying between the pros and cons of facing him, face-to-face, whether to be vague with his questioning or so full out and not regret anything he's going to say, even though he knows he'll be walking out of this conversation harmed, probably nursing a broken nose.

"So?" Jisung folds his arms across his chest.

Hyunjin feels tall next to him, too tall. He feels like he's towering over him, dominating his shadow that easily fits into his own. Hyunjin feels intimidated by his own looming frame, but Jisung's eyes, those deep brown orbs that swam with nothing but hollowness are hostile, always ready to pounce if needed, are much more frightening.

He takes a deep breath and tries to ease himself up, he doesn't know how well Jisung understands body language, but by the light snarl across the smaller's face, he's guessing he doesn't look too confident at all.

"Um, I wanted to ask you something... is that okay?" Hyunjin screams at himself mentally for even sounding so weak. He needed to be strong in front of Jisung, powerful to get it through the boy's mind but he couldn't. Not in front of the boy he so desperately wants to

hold and protect and to run away from.

His heart beats faster in his chest.

Jisung narrows his eyes, his shapely lips lifting into a much more defined snarl, and it sends a flurry of butterflies through Hyunjin's stomach.

“Whatever,” is his answer and Hyunjin is surprised he’s actually still here and hasn’t wandered off, leaving Hyunjin to rip his hair from his scalp.

“It’s just... I’ve noticed some changes—“ if this goes pear-shaped, Hyunjin doesn’t want to drag Chan nor Felix into this mess. Jisung still deserves someone to feel safe and content with and even though Hyunjin knows he will never have the privilege to feel his warmth, his real warmth— not just the warmth of his body— and the pretty smile he’s seen once, the same smile that had sped his heart up so much, he felt it was going to veer right out of his chest.

“And I just needed to make sure that you’re okay,”

Jisung stares at him, his face now blank and Hyunjin shivers. He would much rather him have emotion on his face because the look he gives him is so dauntingly void of anything.

“I’m fine,” He spits back at him and Hyunjin's heart, that had made a temporary home in his throat falls back to his chest. Although his mind then screams at him, because Hyunjin *knows* .

He just knows he's not okay, and maybe Jisung hasn't noticed, but Hyunjin isn't stupid, and if he didn't notice he be ashamed of wasting all the time he spent studying to become a doctor.

There's a crunching of leaves then suddenly and just as Minho comes into view, his own eyes misty and dark, Hyunjin turns back to Jisung hurriedly.

"Just think for me, please," He begs and he watches as Jisung's brows furrow together.

He takes a step away from the smaller, Minho coming to stand beside him.

"Think back to the institution, did they do something you've forgotten about?"

His frown deepens, but Hyunjin is gone before Jisung can even question him.

"What was that about?" Minho inquires with a raised brow. Jisung shrugs dumbly because he truly doesn't know himself.

“I don’t know, but what are you even doing here?” Jisung eyes the gun slung around his chest. Minho points to it. “Chan asked for me to hunt. Are you gonna tag along?”

Jisung hums and falls into step with the elder easily.

“I do have a bone to pick with you,” Minho raises his eyebrows at him, huffing to himself, but he sighs quickly. “Look, I’m really sorry I didn’t warn you before, but it was the only logical thing I could think of at the time,”

“Minho, I understand that, but we could’ve died!”

“But we didn’t!” Minho pulls at his shirt, fanning himself. Jisung can see sweat slick against his skin and Jisung then feels how muggy the air is. His own shirt is damping with moisture from the air around them. Jisung knows it will rain soon.

“I’m terrified of heights as it is, so do you know how much courage that took me to finally jump off? And with you too?” Jisung looks up at him with pursed lips. “I could have saved myself,” Jisung tells him. “So why did you not just jump off yourself and leave me?”

Minho gapes at him, scoffing.

“Look, Jisung,” he removes his gun from his chest and slings it over his shoulder instead. Jisung isn’t sure the reasoning, but it is slightly intimidating. “I,” He thumps at his chest. “Actually care about you.

And all the others, don't get mixed up in your perception of me that I'm some type of careless dickhead, because I'm not and if you think I even had the thought of leaving you behind, you're stupid. Crazy even?"

"Maybe I am crazy," Jisung sneers. "Because I've been locked away so long. My life was ruined, you know, so this, you know is something I never thought I'd be going through and maybe I am struggling! So excuse me if my '*perception*' is off!"

"I lost my mother too, you know. To the disease," Minho suddenly says. "This disease started this all. It ruined your life and it ruined mine, Chan's everyone else who's apart of our new family, everyone in the Capital, the slums, you name it. It's been hard on everyone, so of course, I had to toughen up." Minho shakes his head at him. His eyes are dark, stormy and even though he's speaking to him, unravelling himself right in front of him, Jisung will never not be entranced by his dark pools for eyes, swirling with mystery that he may know soon.

Minho is powerful, hardened at his edges whereas Jisung is frayed, falling apart.

"We're up against the world right now Jisung. The whole world could be against us and out here, we have no idea. You can't be mad at me for trying to keep myself and us all together,"

He stops and stares at Jisung for a while. Jisung stares back. He wouldn't waver under his gaze, even though it sends waves of warmth tingling down his spine. Jisung welcomes it and he stands taller, but Minho still stands that bit taller than him, but it is enough to make him feel insignificant.

Minho screams for attention like he doesn't even know he's doing it, but Jisung thinks there is no way Minho wasn't fit for the amount of attention he absorbs. He's too glorious to miss out.

Minho shines but falls into the shadows a perfect mix of dark and light. Minho is greyscale. Lights up the dark, but darkens the bright light that threatens to blind him.

"If you keep all your emotions suppressed you'll choke on them and die," he says crudely.

Minho blinks at him then scoffs. "From experience?"

Jisung lets out a hollowing laugh. "No," He shakes his head. "I just stopped feeling altogether,"

Minho lifts his brows and then hums to himself. "That doesn't sound entirely healthy, either,"

"You get what you can take," Jisung shrugs his shoulders. He looks around and clicks his tongue when he doesn't see anything to harvest. "Let's go further in," Jisung suggests and Minho wearily sucks in a breath. "I'm not sure, it's going to be dark soon and it's going to start raining anytime soon,"

"Just a little bit then?"

Minho sighs and gestures for them to carry on. Jisung finds it peaceful walking in the overgrown forests. Sometimes they come across old ruins of housing and it's rather peculiar to think this was once a built-up area.

Jisung yelps when the first drop of rain hits the tip of his nose. Minho turns and grimaces at him. "We should've really turn back now the rains only going to get heavier and we're losing daylight—"

Minho's voice drifts off in Jisung's mind.

The younger takes a hesitant step backwards and his eyes widen suddenly. Minho frowns at him. "What's wrong now?"

"You know how we said we were lucky we hadn't had any collisions with animals... well..."

Minho turns, his head snapping around to find a bear, on its four legs, sauntering closer to them.

"Do you think you could outrun a bear?" Minho hisses to him and Jisung whines out. "I'll take that as a no!"

It springs up at them and Minho instantly shoves Jisung away with his palm. Jisung flies out of the bears reach and he can only watch helplessly and Minho is dodging the bear's claws, its teeth and the charging.

Jisung spots a gleam in the grass.

Minho yells out when he trips on a slick with rain tree branch, falling to the ground on his butt and just as the bear launches itself, roaring at the elder a crack surrounds them and the bear suddenly collapses, just a mere few meters from Minho's body, a bullet wound through its skull.

He takes a few deep breaths before his gaze flies to Jisung who's hurrying over to him. "Are you hurt?" He asks panicked, and he only heaves in a sigh of relief when Minho stands and shakes his head. He then looks down at the bear.

"Should we just leave it here?"

"Well, we'd have to get others to help us drag it back if we really want it?"

"Let's just head back, then?"

Night falls and Minho suddenly comes to the realisation that he doesn't recognise anything out here. "Jisung," he mumbles. The younger is close to his side, shivering from the rain and the cooler air of the night. "Yes?" He looks up at him and Minho breathes in heavily.

“We’re lost,”

Jisung's face falls and Minho then sees the panic swirl in his eyes. “What if they left without us...” Minho shakes his head as soon as the words fall out of Jisung's mouth. “They wouldn’t dare. Don’t worry about that. They’ll wait for us...”

“Let’s just try to find our way back,” Minho suggests gently.

Jisung stops not even ten minutes later, clutching his stomach. Minho raises a brow at him. “What’s wrong?” But Jisung only shakes his head. “I just don’t feel very well at the moment...”

“Should I find shelter somewhere to wait out?”

Jisung shrugs. “I really don’t know, but I think that might have to be what we do,”

Minho finds a cave and Jisung jokes that there might be bears in it, but it’s too shallow for a bear to fit, just deep enough for the two of them to be fully sheltered by the elements.

“Hyunjin knew the direction we went in,” Minho reminds Jisung. They’ve made a fire and are huddled closer together. “Hopefully he took notice... he was a bit out of it when I came... Why was that?”

Jisung cocks his head to the side and shrugs. “He just asked me if I could remember if something happened in the institution before, that’s all.”

“Oh... do you remember anything?”

Jisung scoffs and shakes his head. Minho raises a brow.

Hyunjin had been adamant that he was to remember something but Jisung has tried too hard to forget about that place, the mutation of his body and the implantations—

His stomach drops along with his heart and suddenly, he’s too hot, filled with fiery fear.

He had been so stupid. He *is* stupid.

Tiredness was to be expected, but his tiredness outweighed the others own exhaustion tenfold. Everything made sense.

The implantation.

Jisung sucks in a deep breath and wills himself not to cry, but tears pluck in his eyes anyway. Minho is left frantic when he breaks out into tears.

The pulsing sensation heightens and he's suddenly aware of the throbbing in his lower abdomen. His breath is shuddering as he tries to suck in air, to supplement him and this thing —this *baby* — Jisung lets out a sob, gnarling on his bottom lip as his hand squeezes at his swelling abdomen.

Minho can only watch as Jisung holds himself, tears running down his face and when the boy curls into himself, his hands not moving from his stomach, whispering muttered apologies that at neither directed to Minho or himself, he freezes, his heart skidding in his chest.

Hyunjin had suspicions, ones that would change everything and as he watches Jisung breakdown whimpering utters of despair, Minho knows that everything is about to change.

Jisung lifts his head, locking eyes with him as he sucks in a deep breath.

He murmurs the words to Minho that he had been waiting for, dreading, but when Jisung lets out a laugh, it doesn't fill him with joy or sends warmth through his body.

His laugh is hollow, cold, mourning and Minho is left feeling frozen to the bone.

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Notes for the Chapter:

Hi!! im so excited to post the chapters from here on out but I'm just going to say the tags are really important! This fic is not light at all and it deals with quite heavy topics so take that how you will but not everything is going to get better... heck

And as always id like to thank everyone for leaving so much feedback!! i love you guys!!

[my twt!](#)

12. 11→

The air is icy. Even with the warmth of a fire crackling near their bodies, the air is frozen, thick with tension and unspoken fear.

Minho can feel it.

Jisung is radiating fear, his whole body is trembling, his fingers that are still clutching at his stomach are shaking and Minho wants to reach out and hold him, squeeze his hands until the jitters stop, but it only took one look into the boy's eyes for him to stop.

Jisung looks like he's not even present at the moment. He's distant, eyes hollowed out but his gentle moments are the only thing that's telling Minho that he's at least physically okay.

The rain pelting down outside the shallow cave is filling up the silence and Jisung's face mirrors it, his own storm rushing through him. The night has fully blanketed over the skies and Minho begins to feel tiredness seep into his bones, but he fights it.

"Jisung," he mumbles and hesitantly, he reaches out his hand, landing it on the smaller boy's shoulder. Jisung barely reacts to the touch and Minho gulps down a deep breath when he turns his head, looking straight into his eyes. He tries to stop the freezing feeling that snaps down his spine, but he can't help but shiver.

"We have to find a way back to the others," Ever so slowly, Minho watches as he comes back to the surface, his hollow eyes slowly filling with a sadness that shakes Minho's heart. "But we're lost," Jisung murmurs out and his voice is hoarse. Minho sighs and nods. "Then, do you want to stay here for a bit while I go look?"

Jisung looks down at his feet.

He's silent for minutes and Minho stays still, keeps quiet, just waiting for him to be ready.

"Do you think that we have started a revolt?" Minho's eyes fly to Jisung who is staring at the opposite side of the cave's wall. His heart

thumps hard in his chest.

Jisung turns back to him with those haunting eyes. "I think we have," he murmurs and Minho blinks.

He nods and he watches Jisung as he hums, pursing his lips. "Do you think we could finish it?"

"Jisung," Minho reaches out this time and holds his hands. "Don't think about that right now, please..." His voice is on the edge of pleading. Jisung's shoulders drop further.

"What if it's a girl?" Jisung then says quietly and it's so soft, his voice suddenly coated in a singing warmth that fights back at the icy air surrounding them. Minho almost doesn't hear it, but when he does he freezes once more.

He had been sitting here, feeling suffocated in the small cave, his mind still clear enough to function while Jisung had sat just as silent, but his mind was full with scenarios. From the moment he had become aware of the fluttering beat inside his abdomen, his mind had become full with worries, with terror and disgust but he still had felt that same hope, the twinge of a sudden warmth in his cold heart.

Jisung had bitten back all his memories of his last flutter, the tiny thing that had ruined him, but now, with a new flutter his heart is heavy and he fights the same emotions he felt back then. Disgust, hatred, awe.

Love.

Jisung barely knows love. But he knew the warmth in his heart hadn't been anything less than love and now, a part of his heart is thawing and Jisung doesn't have the will to stop it.

He's just as torn as he was last time, suffering between the lines of hating everything and falling in love with it.

Jisung wants to cry, he wants warm arms to crawl into and tell him it's okay, that he's going to be okay. But it won't be okay, because Jisung has jeopardised this journey and as much as he wants to confide in someone, tell them of his jumbled up feelings that he can't

quite figure out himself, he knows he can't because who will look at him like he's not some type of psycho for wanting to hate and love the flutter.

Minho's mouth goes dry, but he swallows thickly and squeezes his hand. Jisung finds he likes the touch, the warmed calloused warm in his own much softer hands.

"Then we'll protect her just like how we'll protect you,"

Minho's words send a rush of emotion through him and when his lip juts out, Minho only squeezes his hands again and allows him to cry. He doesn't hush him or tells him to stop crying but he sits with him, his hands warm and holding his frayed seams together.

"I wish the world was different," Jisung whispers. His head is tucked between his knees, his eyes turned to Minho.

Minho doesn't say anything, he lets Jisung talk through his gentle sniffing sobs. "I want to change it," he murmurs. His hand is clamped tightly around his stomach. "If I can have this baby, I don't want them to be born into a world where," his voice cracks. "It's so corrupt. I don't want them to know that they were born out of human desperation, or nonconsensual procedures..."

Minho knows Jisung's scars run deep, but he's not sure how far they go but Jisung has said enough, and Minho can guess they go far deeper than he can even fathom.

"I want a world that's safe for my kid," Jisung whispers. "I want the days that follow our tomorrow, their tomorrow to be safe,"

"Overmorrow," Minho mutters gently. Jisung cocks his head at Minho, his brows furrow in gently and Minho gives him a soft smile. "It's a really old word," Minho tells him. "It means the day that follows tomorrow,"

Jisung gives him a small smile, the corners of his lips lifting slightly. His eyes gleam in the firelight, tears highlighted in the warm orange light. "Overmorrow," Jisung says with a breath.

And Minho's breath fails him.

→

Minho's breath comes out in shudders. The rain makes the cooling nights colder and with his drenched clothes sticking to his skin, Minho can't help but shiver from the cold that digs its way into his bones.

He had only been walking for twenty minutes, leaving Jisung alone in the sheltered cave, no wanting to make him walk in the elements, after his eventful day, especially in his current state. Minho hopes he either bumps into someone soon or finds a camp they've set up because as much as the cave could be good shelter overnight, Minho wants to get Jisung back and have Hyunjin make sure he's okay.

"Minho!" Felix's voice is loud and clear even over the rain and Minho could cry in relief. "Felix!" He shouts back and welcomes the boy into his arms. He almost loses his footing on the slick ground, but he keeps his ground.

"Do you know the way back?" Minho asks him as soon as he wiggles out of the embrace. Felix nods his head and peers over his shoulder, looking for Jisung. "I left him in a cave," Minho mutters and Felix frowns. "Do you know the way back to the cave?"

Minho scoffs and nods. "I do, thank you very much our last predicament would've had been up to me almost getting mauled by a fucking bear," Felix gapes at him, his mouth falling open and his eyes widening. "Are you okay? What about Jisung?" Minho sucks in a deep breath. "He's okay,"

Felix sees through his fronting and frowns deeply, scurrying off in the direction he saw Minho come from.

"Hey!" Minho cries and hurries after him. "You don't even know where to go!"

“Then lead the way,” Felix gestures with his hand and his voice is firm, something Minho hasn’t heard. The boy’s usual sunny perception has disappeared and in the dark, rainy night, there is no light left radiating from him.

Minho doesn’t dare speak. Felix walks with purpose, his jaw hard set and his shoulders squared out. Minho knew the boys shared a bond that had developed quickly, deeper than Minho had been able to imagine Jisung would allow.

When they reach the cave, Minho stands outside in the pouring rain, watching as Felix eases his way in and gently leads Jisung back out, carrying the single back that Minho had on his back before. Felix sends a harsh look to Minho when Jisung wanders out, gripping the plastic cover Felix had brought with him. His eyes are reddened, and he’s still shaking and Minho’s eyes drift to his hand that’s clamped tightly around his stomach.

“Come on,” Felix pulls on his free hand gently. “We found an abandoned farmhouse to stay in for a bit,” Felix tells them. Jisung allows Felix to drag him along, but he doesn’t go willingly until he sends Minho a look that tells him to keep his mouth shut.

→

The moment they near the old cottage, its gardens overrun and covering over half of the stone house, there’s commotion out in the front. Someone has slashed the overgrown plants back enough so there’s a clear path to the rotting door almost falling off its hinges.

Minho jumps forward, leaving Felix and Jisung clinging onto each other while he scrambles forward, shoving his body between the fighting men.

“What is going on?!” Minho cries, trapping Chan’s wrist in his hand.

It's a struggle to keep his fist from escaping his grip, but Minho digs his nails in and Chan pulls back with a hiss.

"He attacked me!" Hyunjin grits out. He swipes his hands down his dirtied shirt and snarls at the eldest. Chan retaliates with a growl and Minho frantically looks over to Changbin whose arms are wrapped tightly around Seungmin's and Jeongin's waists, keeping the frightened boys away from the fight.

Changbin just gulps and jerks his head in Jisung's general direction.

Minho looks over to the boy who's shaking still and in the heat of the moment, Minho has forgotten all about the rain that's soaked him to his core. Felix could've given him a plastic cover too, but with the look he had given him earlier, Minho didn't dare press for one.

"Chan," He grabs his friends shoulders and stares into his eyes. "You don't lose your temper. Ever. What happened?" Chan lets out a frustrated groan and lifts his head to the skies. Rain lands on his face and pours down the curves of his face. Chan could be crying, but with all the rain, Minho can't make it out.

"God, you guys are back," Chan lets out a deep breath and suddenly bundles Minho up in his arms. Minho frowns but hugs him back, allowing the eldest to breathe his earthy scent in.

"I'm so sorry," Chan tells Hyunjin when a hesitant Jisung wanders in. Hyunjin looks down, averting his gaze and even in the rain, Minho can tell he's crying. His eyes are red and his lips jut out between his cries. "He said... that it was his fault that Jisung and you weren't coming back..." Chan murmurs gently. Jisung shuffles closer and closer and Chan's breath hitches at the sigh of the boys red eyes, his bright red cheeks and the puffy skin around his eyes.

"He said he ruined him,"

Minho takes another look at Jisung.

He still refuses to move his hand and Minho wonders briefly just why he isn't willing to, but he vanishes the thought quickly and he moves his eyes along the boy, taking in his clenched fist, the way his feet dig

into the wet earth, stabilising himself. He stands tall, his spine straight and his face is covered in a mist of mystery.

Jisung isn't ruined.

Jisung is far from ruined and Minho knows, without a doubt, that the boy craved out of hellfire itself will need a lot more to ruin him. And he feels it too, looking at him, he knows Jisung will triumph everything that tries to burn him down. Because Jisung's hellfire burns hotter, brighter than the roaring bronze of the fires that try to suffocate him. Jisung glows in blue flame, white-hot flames burning throughout his whole being. He screams that he's invincible and Minho will watch as he disintegrates anything that comes his way.

And Minho wishes he will become the water that eases his burning, lapping up with cool shores and the gentlest waves to lick to pain away that threatens to burn him from the inside out.

→

Hyunjin swallows hard.

"I," he begins but Jisung just shakes his head. They were the last left in the first room of the old, weather-worn house. Jisung had stopped and silently held onto Hyunjin's sleeve, keeping him stagnant.

"I don't really want to hear anything apology related right now," He tells him and his voice is the gentlest Hyunjin has ever heard it. "I just... I just want you to check me over and confirm it maybe... make sure it's okay?"

Hyunjin gulps again and nods. "There's a few rooms... some even have old beds still... I'm not sure how hygienic it would to use them though," Jisung just nods. "The floor will be fine," Jisung murmurs. "It's not like we've been sleeping on clouds for the past month."

Hyunjin purses his lips and nods. "Right,"

The house is big enough for rooms to be free and Hyunjin silently leads Jisung up the creaky and stairs that are probably not safe to walk up anymore, but they don't crumble or crack under their weight, so Hyunjin deems it fine, and finally a free room that's been very obviously untouched for decades.

Plants have broken their way through the smashed window and they climb around the walls, creeping closer to the door. It's beautiful, though. The vines are flowering and Jisung breathes in deep, his senses overwhelmed with the smell of fresh jasmine.

"It smells nice," Jisung murmurs and Hyunjin hums. "It's very calming... I thought you might like it," Jisung looks over at the taller male and nods, but his face doesn't flicker with any type of emotion.

But Hyunjin still has to clench his suddenly sweaty fists, because no matter how much Jisung doesn't try, he always seems to make Hyunjin's heart thump a little harder and a little faster.

"I wanted to ask earlier..." Hyunjin admits gently. Jisung takes a seat on the floor as Hyunjin zips open his backpack, shuffling through it and getting out his medical gear. "But I didn't want to push the boundaries,"

"I would've probably pummelled you anyway," Jisung whispers back. Hyunjin lets out what sounds like a laugh through his nose. "Right. Maybe that's why I didn't,"

"Then what made you so brave today?"

Hyunjin shuffles closer, his hands full of instruments that sends a wave of chilling fear up Jisung's spine. Those things, those instruments had been such a big part of his life for seven years... and now it sends flashbacks through his head. He swallows and looks at Hyunjin's face, but his nightmares had contained his handsome face for far too long and the mere look at Hyunjin's perfectly carved face sends him into an inner frenzy.

"You jumped off a cliff," Hyunjin reminds him. Jisung frowns. "I was thrown off, thanks very much,"

"Physical exertion... you've passed out more than once, Jisung it's worrying me..." Jisung's mouth goes dry. "Not another one," he whispers and this time, his eyes go wide in horror. The emotion that Hyunjin had seen across his face when Jisung was seventeen...

"No, no don't get the wrong idea, Jisung I just think we need to make sure you're both doing okay," Jisung breathes out a sigh of relief.

"But I still want someone else here," Jisung says rather bravely. Hyunjin looks at him with a soft look in his eyes and nods. "I can get Felix..."

Felix sits at his side, holding onto his hand comfortingly. He hadn't exploded at the news, but he had silently sat next to Jisung and allowed the shorter boy to rest his head on his shoulder. "I'll always look after you," is what he says back and Jisung squeezes his eyes shut.

Felix helps distract Jisung from Hyunjin's poking and prodding and although Hyunjin has his full consent and his best intentions at hand, Jisung still feels panicked.

Maybe it's the dread of finding out whether he had been stupid enough to push himself too far over the edge again.

"Last time," Jisung croaks out, his voice tight with what only can be the will to keep tears at bay. "I was so conflicted when it happened," Jisung can feel Felix tense underneath him, but he continues. "I was so... devastated. I was miserable and I felt like nothing would be right again, but the sick and twisted part of me was so glad that I was freed from the beginning of a life I never chose... and now," Jisung sucks in a deep breath.

"I think I feel the same way," he mutters. Hyunjin stops his movements across his abdomen and looks up at him. "I want it," Jisung says gently. "But I can't. I don't want it, but I do. I want to be able to love any children I have one day... but I'm so scared. What happens when they find out I never wanted them? When they realise they were made out of desperation for the human race and not made to be loved... the government has won even when we're this far away

from them,” He whispers and he cracks open his eyes. “I don’t even know who has sired the child... isn’t that terrible?” Jisung’s voice cracks and to everyone’s surprise, he leans forwards and catches Hyunjin’s face between his hands.

“If it happens again,” Jisung sucks in a deep breath of air. “Last time it ruined me, so if you think... it might happen again, I need to know, I need to prepare for the worst because if it happens again, I don’t know if I could handle it,” Felix squeezes his hand tighter and Hyunjin stares at him with glassy orbs.

He nods once.

“Then,” Hyunjin croaks out. “Prepare for the worst, hope for the best,”

→

The feelings Jisung feels contradict him, leaving him a host of winding storms of hate and disgust and with the gentlest breeze of jasmine brushing by him.

“I don’t know what to do,” it brushes his lips as it comes out and Jisung hugs himself tighter, clenching his thighs tighter together. His hand stays on his stomach and Jisung relishes the warmth of his skin against his skin and as he closes his eyes, his head gently burrows into Hyunjin’s shoulder blade.

And as sleep falls over him, Jisung swears he can feel the throbbing of his blood nestling around the flutter, and the softest flickering of a heart deeply nestled inside him.



Hyunjin feels like he could break at any time.

Jisung's body is warm behind him and Hyunjin is statue-still but want has swallowed him whole, consuming his whole being. He wants to turn around, bundle up the smaller boy, rest his hand on his waist and keep him warm.

Hyunjin wants to allow him into his heart, and each passing minute, each day that goes by, Jisung slithers in and Hyunjin is absolutely doomed.

Jisung can barely stand him and Hyunjin knows, the only reason he's being so lenient to him right now is because Hyunjin knows of his inner turmoil, the feelings that he's scared that are going to rip him apart. Hyunjin would like to think Jisung is getting over his hatred for him, that he's allowing him into his heart, but Hyunjin knows better than that.

Hyunjin is a warm body right now, and as empty as it should make him feel, Hyunjin feels needed, like he is giving Jisung the protection he's always wanted to give him.

Hyunjin lays awake, listening to the confessions that leave Jisung's lips and the whimpers he lets out during his sleep, plagued by the memories that Hyunjin had fought hard to forget himself.

Those memories, ones that Hyunjin knows Jisung had tried to swallow— but it had choked him and he had no choice but to leave them alone, hoping for them to become dormant, but now Hyunjin can hear the rapid heartbeat from Jisung's abdomen that had rung in his ears moments before and Hyunjin fights sleep because once he drifts off, he forgets the sound of life fluttering and all he's left with is the sound of silence, death.

And Hyunjin just can't watch Jisung's heart tear apart again.



Notes for the Chapter:

i know i say this all the time now but thank you so so much for all the feedback and support I'm honestly so overwhelmed by it since i didn't really get much last time!! but now!!! wowie!!

I love receiving comments honestly i love reading them all its just so... its so good i cant even omg im really reallyyyy glad that the story is appreciated a lot! im so happy when i receive the comments saying overmorrow is like reading a young adult sci fi :D

seriously, thank you guys so much!! i cant wait to share the rest of my story with you!

[my twt!](#)

13. 12 →

Notes for the Chapter:

As always please be aware of the tags!!

“We can’t stay here and just wait,” Jisung mumbles from his bowl of mashed vegetables and boiled meat. Everyone looks up at him from their breakfast.

Seungmin stops shuffling around the table and cocks his head at Jisung. He silently reaches out and places another chunk of boiled meat into the ceramic dish Changbin had found earlier and washed in the nearby creek. Jisung looks up at him and the boy just smiles, eyes crinkling prettily.

The others had found out in the early morning about Jisung's current predicament, and all of them had been surprisingly calm.

Changbin had froze and Jisung had seen him swallow hard and sniff when he first saw him. Jisung knew he was beating himself up because of his previous statement during the first few days they travelled together.

Jisung had awoken to a soft touch across his face, fingertips swirling over his back muscles. He opened his eyes and met himself with a firm chest that kept him warm throughout the night. When he saw Hyunjin's face, he sighed and shuffled away gently. He would've been fuming if it weren't for the heavy blanket of exhaustion draped over him.

“Jisung,” Chan starts gently. His hand is warm where he wraps it around Jisung's forearm. “We don’t want to push you any further. You’ve been struggling and it’s fine to admit that, okay?” Jisung looks down at Chan's hand and gently reaches out to drag a fingertip over his rough cuticles. “We don’t want you to get sick...” he trails off.

“Or lose the baby,” Jisung adds crudely and someone sucks in a deep breath of air across from the table.

“Well,” Chan says. “We have the best interest in you at the moment,”

“What if I said I didn’t want it, then?”

There’s a silence that fills the room then, thick and deadly. Jisung regrets saying it as soon as it left his mouth.

“Then we’d support you too,”

It’s Seungmin who tells him that and Jisung looks at him, thankful that he was brave enough to speak first. Seungmin gives him another smile, one that’s comforting and Jisung as the urge to hug him, which is as comforting as it is foreign.

“Of course,” Chan nods along and Jisung gulps. He locks eyes with Felix who gives him a smile, soft but his eyes are sad.

“I don’t... I don’t know what I want,” Jisung admits slowly. “That’s fine, Jisung. Really. We’re not asking you to give us an answer, we just want you to be okay... that’s all,”

Jisung gulps and nods his head. “So we stay here for a while, then?”

“For as long as you possibly need,” Chan tells him.

→

The days flow by in the worn cottage.

As much as it was dusty and mostly unusable now, the cottage was comfortable and life was easier for a little bit. Chan and Minho had taken up cleaning the fenced-in area at the back of the house, planting a small garden from seeds they kept from different fruits and vegetables they found along the way.

The others had joined in with helping with the garden once they realised they weren’t just lazing around in the cottage or hunting in

the fields near the little house.

Jeongin had come back a few days prior after finding an old quilt that was in rather good nick for being so old and washed it in the nearby lake, fixed its stuffing with some of the feathers plucked from the pheasants Minho and Changbin had come back with and presented it to Jisung with a large smile across his face.

Jisung had sat there, like an idiot staring up at him until Jeongin had placed it in his lap, proclaiming he had made it for him. And Jisung hasn't slept so well in his life ever since he received the gift.

The first days after arriving Jisung did nothing but sleep and eat, replenishing energy that he seemed to never be able to recuperate. They had been worried at first until Hyunjin had told them it was normal and that his body was going through big changes and trying to share all the nutrients to both himself and the little life.

"If you're making a garden, you're thinking we're going to be here for a bit," Jisung muses as he wanders outside. Chan gives him a smile while his hands are still covered in earth. He's covered in dirt and Jisung scrunches his nose up at him when he comes closer to him.

"It gives us something to do, too," Chan pokes a little sprouting and smiles widely. "Besides, these grow pretty fast,"

"Do you think we're safe here?"

Jisung watched as Chan's smile falters. He takes a step backwards, almost trampling on the radishes that have popped up already.

"Jisung," Chan breathes out. Jisung fumbles with the hem of his shirt, wrapping it around himself tighter. "We've travelled for almost two months... we have quite a lot of distance down."

"And yet there's still the risk of getting caught," Jisung reminds him. Chan frowns but nods. "I'm anxious," Jisung admits. "I'm scared because what if they do find us? Look at me, Chan," he gestures to himself, poking his abdomen. "The moment they realise that their

attempts worked, I won't ever be able to make a choice for myself again. I spent seven years not having a say. I spent each day in pain waiting for what the next moment would bring, I couldn't escape anything. Not even my own head because they ruined us completely. And I'm sorry if I'm overbearing if I'm scared of the chances of being caught again but it's because that was my life. I had nothing and now I can't go back. Not that I know what being free feels like."

Chan stares for a moment and then he nods. "I understand," he murmurs. "I really do, and I think we're all scared... but there's been nothing so far... I think we've gone far enough for a little while..."

"Just promise me," Jisung whispers. "That if something goes wrong... if something happens, you stay with me. With us all,"

Chan gulps. "Even Hyunjin," Jisung stiffens the tiniest bit. His mouth twitches.

"Even Hyunjin," Jisung replies.

"I promise," And Jisung knows Chan means it.

→

"You like Jisung," Minho states.

Hyunjin splutters and turns to him and frowns. "I do not!" He squawks at the older male. Minho raises a brow and jabs his hunting knife in his direction. Hyunjin huffs back at him. "You literally cannot be any more obvious. You can't fool me,"

Hyunjin then sighs loudly and plops down in the field. Minho follows him.

They were the ones chosen to go out and hunt. They had found enough to last three days already and were just about to head back until Minho opened his mouth.

“He hates you,” Minho deadpans and Hyunjin gives him a glare but it falters quickly and then he whines. “I know,”

“So,” Minho then clears his throat. “What's going on then?”

Hyunjin sighs even louder this time. “I don’t want... I don’t want to be like ‘oh hi, I really like you’ because of reasons...” Minho stifles a small laugh. “Just say he can’t stand you, it’s fine,”

“Right. But it’s a little bit more complicated than it seems... the trust between us, it’s small, whatever little trust he has for me... I think it can grow and I think maybe one day he’ll be able to accept what happened between us, but I’m mainly scared of myself...”

“Because you want him?” Hyunjin flushes red, catches his bottom lip between his teeth and nods gingerly.

Minho sighs and pats his back. “And the heart wants what it wants,”

There's a tug in Minho's heart, but he ignores it and allows Hyunjin to vent.

Jisung burns bright. And Minho wasn't the only one who saw through the dark facade to see the raging spectacle that Jisung is.

Minho feels like the own fire in his heart has been doused out by a bucket of icy water.

It stings.

→

Weeks pass.

The sun sets and it falls, in a never-ending cycle.

Jisung notices the small changes to himself. The tiredness that had draped over him thickly weeks ago has lifted, allowing him to do more than just laze around and sleep. He had noticed the tiny swell of his abdomen.

Jisung had thrown his shirt back over himself as soon as he had noticed and allowed himself to seek the warm comfort of Felix's hugs.

The mixed feelings haven't left and instead of them easing up, Jisung feels like he's going to choke on them.

So instead of staying inside and wallowing away, Jisung has made himself useful.

He Seungmin and Jeongin had taken the time to fix the other old blankets, patching the holes with the too-broken blankets thread and Jeongin had snooped through the cottage enough to find needles in a drawer. Seungmin teaches them how to stitch, saying he learnt from his mother and Jeongin was happy to go out and grab the pile of feathers they had accumulated for extra insulation.

And finally, Jisung takes up Changbin's offer to learn how to hunt. He had asked a few days back about teaching the others to hunt. Felix and Jeongin had gone with him the other day and Seungmin had already been taught by Minho, so all left was Jisung to learn.

He ties the laces of his boots tighter and smooths his hand down his front. Hyunjin's eyes are set on him and Jisung turns to look at him. Hyunjin wavers again like he did years ago but Jisung doesn't glare back at him this time.

"Don't get hurt," is all Hyunjin says before he turns to leave back inside. Changbin just grumbles and gives him a hunting knife. "Just be extra careful. If you need a break, tell me and don't just," Change gestures with his hands. "Faint on me,"

Jisung scoffs. "I'm feeling better!"

Changbin just winces and nods.

Yesterday, it had rained and the earth is still damp, the forest floor

now sticky and slippery mud that causes Jisung to almost lose his footing more than he'd like to admit.

"So since it rained last night, it should be easy to find tracks in the mud," He points to the ground and Jisung's eyes follow to the muggy ground. There's a footprint, a shape obviously made by an animal that has hooves.

Good thing that, because Jisung isn't ready to come into contact with any more bears, or predators in general.

"When you follow them, you must be on the lookout for the animal, but you have to be stealthy, quiet and calculate your movements,"

Jisung watches Changbin's movements and copies his moves carefully. He watches where to put his feet, careful not to step on a leaf that will crunch under his weight.

"And once you follow fresh tracks for a while," Changbin then whispers under his breath and he moves around. And over his shoulder, Jisung sees a deer munching on a bush. "You find your goal,"

Changbin takes the lead, and Jisung flinches when the loud sound fills his ears. "Come on, I taught the others how to drag it back without injuring yourself or damaging the deer," Changbin grips his sleeve and drags him closer. Jisung gulps and treads softly, slowly.

Changbin squats down and grips onto a hind leg.

Jisung gulps and his breath leaves him when his eyes find the stark red blood covering the leaved ground. Changbin seems unbothered, but Jisung takes a step back.

He wants to look away. Away from the blood that causes his heart to pick up. He feels hot all of a sudden, clammy and Jisung lets out a lone whimper.

Changbin looks back and frowns.

Jisung falls. His knees hit the wet ground and his stomach lurches.

His gaze glazes over, the image of the deer fading away to the white walls, the white sheets and the vibrant red.

His hands feel sticky like they did when he was covered in blood, his head spins and he falls deeper and deeper. He remembers the pulsing pain, the thunder striking inside of him and Jisung chokes out a scream, piercing and terrified.

A hand falls on his shoulder and it feels like it did then, when Hyunjin's warmth had encased him. Jisung falters and when he hears a voice calling to him, Jisung feels as if it's the same words that echoed throughout his mind for days, weeks, months after.

Jisung grips on to something and feels a shirt crumble in his grasp. Jisung cries out and his vision blurs, into darkness and crimson and the last thing he hears before he slips, falling under the wave of memories is a shout of his name.

Jisung goes limp in Changbin's hold.

→

“Hyunjin! Hyunjin!” Changbin comes screaming towards the house, an unconscious Jisung dangling in his hold.

Changbin is panting, struggling for breath as he shuffles the boy into the young doctor's arms. Hyunjin rushes to Jisung's sleeping spot and lays him down on the blankets.

“What happened?” He breathes out. Changbin is still heaving breaths in and Hyunjin waits anxiously for Changbin to talk.

“I was teaching him how to hunt, and he just,” Changbin lets out a choked cry. Hyunjin reaches his hand out and pats his friend's shoulder. “He just started fading, screaming things like he wasn't

even present in the moment,”

Hyunjin turns back to Jisung and heaves out a loud sigh. Jisung would be fine after some rest, but Hyunjin knows the wounds his mind and heart suffer are gaping, open and prone to infection.

“Is he going to be okay, Jinnie?” Hyunjin grips Changbin's hands and nods. Changbin deflates and leans his head on the wall beside them. He breathes in deeply, obviously relieved. “Jisung's been through a lot,” Hyunjin says softly. “And those things won't leave him anytime soon.” Changbin slouches, his eyes darting between the unconscious boy and the young doctor.

“How can we fix that, then?” Changbin's voice is small and his presence shrinks further when Hyunjin shakes his head. “We can't,” He answers honestly. “Only time can heal wounds like these. The only thing we can possibly do is keep him safe from the things that bring back the memories,”

“No more hunting for him, then?”

Hyunjin sighs loudly and nods. “I think,” he pauses briefly. “If anyone or something is bleeding, or if there's blood around, we make sure he's not exposed to that,” Changbin gulps.

“Something really bad happened to him, didn't it? Is that why you're so persistent with him? Why you won't give up? Because you know what happened?”

Hyunjin could say no, that he only wished to make sure he was doing okay, but his heart has stretched far, the end of its boundaries not in sight. Hyunjin's heart reaches out for the small boy, his fingers itch to hold him, to feel his wounds heal underneath his skin.

Hyunjin wants to protect him, shelter him, keep him warm. And when Changbin notices his apprehension, his eyes narrow slightly.

“Don't tell me...”

“He's special,” Hyunjin spits out. Changbin's eyes then soften and Hyunjin relaxes.

“It’s not because of his past, but the boy underneath all of this,” he gestures to him. Hyunjin sucks in a deep breath of air. “There is something marvellous there. Something so... breathtaking that I can’t help myself but fall into the allure,”

Changbin bites onto his bottom lip. “What’s he going to think when he finally finds out of your crush on him?”

“It’s not a crush!” Hyunjin hisses and Changbin raises a brow.

“Then what is it? Don’t tell me you’re in love with him for goodness sakes?”

Hyunjin goes quiet and only the sound of his rapidly beating heart is enough to tell Changbin of Hyunjin's buried feelings.

→

Jisung wakes a few hours later after the rest of the crew arrive back from their gathering trip.

The food is ready when he wakes and Jisung takes a bowl of stew and eats it slowly, his stomach still churning from the aftermath of his episode.

Hyunjin is staring at him while he eats, either monitoring him or just plain curious about him, but Jisung assumes it’s both. These past weeks Hyunjin has stayed in his line of vision almost all day every day.

But he doesn’t boil over in anger when he sees him anymore. He thinks of strong hands, a firm grip and his pretty face that he remembers seeing so vividly, but somewhere underneath his layers, Jisung cannot find the bubble of hate. The feeling that had once overcome him and almost eaten him alive.

Hyunjin hovers, floating in and out, his warm honey brown eyes

landing on him before he turns, giving Jisung space that he's becoming to not want, not need.

It feels like hours before they pack away dinner and when Felix finally comes to cuddle with him in their little corner, Jisung allows himself to sleep, suddenly content and warm in Felix's hold. His belly full only helps further him into the intoxicating allure of sleep.

And Jisung dreams.

Of easier days, when he would raid farms and accept the flower chains his friend Jooyeon had made for him.

In his sleep, Jisung thrashes, once, twice and then the misting haze of good memories dissipate, running out of good things and when Jisung thrashes a third time, it's the nightmares that haunt him.

He imagines a face so clearly, a tiny cry that pierces the air and Jisung's body jolts, reaching for the thing that had never come to be in the first place, using his might to protect its blurry future.

And then he screams.

Felix is awake in seconds, trying to hold him in a hug, but Jisung is thrashing wildly, swinging fists and kicking his legs. Felix cries out, scared for his friend but also in pain from the kick to the stomach he receives.

Chan perks up first at the cries and rushes on over, scrambling across on his knees and grabbing Jisung from Felix's hold.

"Are you okay?" He looks up at Felix with concerned eyes. Felix winces and rubs at his stomach but nods. He fights Jisung in his hold, but Chan is much stronger and is able to ease his thrashing, but Jisung's breathing quickens and he lets out a scream.

"My baby! They took my baby!" Chan freezes at the wail and his eyes widen, flickering over to Felix who is on the verge of tears. He looks shocked and he shakes his head, biting at his nails because he too doesn't know what this is about.

“Jisung,” Chan begins but Hyunjin leaps forwards, taking the trembling boy from the elder's arms.

“You’re okay,” Hyunjin mutters gently. He holds him close, pressing their warmth together and Chan watches, still, as Hyunjin manages to calm down his harsh movements.

“It’s okay,” He tells him gently. Jisung still cries, murmuring about a lost baby. Hyunjin holds him a bit tighter. The rest of the group awoken from the commotion and Minho grips Jeongin’s arm to keep him from wandering over to his friend.

“The baby!” He blubbers loudly and with a gasp, Jisung flinches backwards, his teary eyes opening to meet Hyunjin’s. But he’s distant like he’s still living in his nightmare.

“No, no,” Hyunjin wipes more tears from his eyes. Jisung clings onto him and Hyunjin thinks he’s going to have a lot to explain when he comes to, but Hyunjin seems like he’s the only one not shocked out of his boots and emotionally available for Jisung right now. “There was no baby,” Hyunjin tells him gently, careful not to roll him over into another fit of panic.

“Yes, there was!” Jisung blubbers out. “My baby, I— my baby!”

Hyunjin tries his best to talk him through it, distracting him doesn’t work at all, so he waits patiently, talking back to him so Jisung doesn’t fall back under the wave threatening to drown him.

This isn’t Jisung Hyunjin thought he knew.

The Jisung he knows is so shut off, a mystery and to see him broken at his seams, leaking out his most vulnerable side, Hyunjin feels sick for him. He knows Jisung would rather keep this to himself, this trauma that crushed through his chest, but Jisung was still human. As much as he acted as things didn’t affect him, Hyunjin has learnt twice today that Jisung cannot fight against the force of nature.

He finally gains control over himself again a while later and when he sees Hyunjin holding him, he flinches in his hold as if Hyunjin's hands are burning fires licking at his skin. But to Hyunjin's surprise,

he doesn't move from his grasp, but he falls back into it.

"Sorry," he mutters gently. Hyunjin is surprised he had even apologised in the first place. He had thought he would've been angrier, but the shadows of purple around his eyes are heavy and his eyelids are droopy with fatigue.

Something inside Hyunjin clenches.

"It's okay, Jisung," Chan assures him in a quiet tone. "As long as you're okay now,"

He looks around him and meets Minho's eyes. His gaze is hardened to that same mystery and Jisung gulps as he stares unapologetically towards him. It makes Jisung squirm the slightest bit.

"I didn't have a baby," Jisung suddenly blurts out. He can feel his cheeks heat up and embarrassment swirls in his tummy. He had been looking right into Minho's eyes as he spoke, suddenly captivated and quickly fallen entranced. He had lost control of his tongue and now the burning of his cheeks and ears are red hot as he flushes bright red.

"Umm... yeah? No baby..." He whispers, hanging his head. "But they said they'd take them away when I had them," he continues on and even Jisung doesn't know what's come over him in this moment. He had wanted to hide that part of him away, but it felt... okay to share that with them.

None of this had ever been Jisung's fault. Nor had it been Felix's, Seungmin's or Jeongin's. It had been the government's fault.

They had failed to keep precious citizens safe.

A bubble builds up in Jisung's tummy.

Chan's features twist into a look of despair, but Jisung can still see the clear fume of anger in his brown eyes. Jisung can't seem to blame him and as he's surrounded by the seven boys that have become each others moving home, Jisung can't shake the growing feeling of wanting to find safety.

But Jisung feels something else under that. Something dark. Something sinister. But he will not say it. Not now, not yet. Maybe when they are finally safe, maybe in Mydar he will speak of the plan he wishes to take part in.

Jisung has one wish.

To take down the people that had failed him and his new friends. Take down the people that had disregarded the lives of young boys for their own greed. Defenceless boys they were when they entered, but now Jisung looks up at Chan, takes in the thick muscle coating his body and eyes the guns in the corner of the room.

Together, they're strong. Together they can be a force that Jisung requires for such a wish. But he looks at them. They all have a story to tell, but Jisung knows that these boys who he travels with to find safety are here for all the same reason.

Together.

Together with them, Jisung can do it.

A revolution is what he craves, the taste of destruction filling his mouth and leaving him drunk on the taste.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HI!!!

i hope everyone had a nice holiday!

get ready for the next chapter heheh ;DD

i honestly cannot thank you all enough for all the

sweet comments I LOVE YOU ALL 🌍 I'm going away for a few days this week so i might not be able to reply to comments as quick but i will make sure i get around to it! stay safe everyone!!

also if you want to follow my twt here it is! i always post a link when i update anything or post something new!

[my twt!](#)

14. 13→

Notes for the Chapter:

Tw! Mentions of suicide, death, injuries

Jisung drops his head on his knees, tucking himself tightly into a ball.

“Can we go?” Jisung whispers against his leg, muffling his voice slightly.

Hyunjin's fingertips gently dance around the boy's knee, but they come to a halt when he lifts his gaze to Jisung's face. The boy looks even more tired than what he recalls. His eyes are droopy, his lips pouted and the skin around his eyes is reddened and swollen.

Hyunjin slowly backs away, trying to read him further.

Instead of his usual scowl, he wears for Hyunjin, his face is soft, something Hyunjin hasn't seen him wear ever. Hyunjin gulps because Jisung is so unbelievably, effortlessly ethereal in his own way. He can look like he wants to burn the world down to the ends of the earth itself, his jaw handset and his eyes terrifying but Jisung glows brighter than those fires he wishes to burn.

“In the morning,” Jisung murmurs again. “We should leave,”

“Jisung, I don't know—“ Jisung looks into Hyunjin's eyes.

His brows furrow together ever so lightly, but it causes his face to contort into this look— this look of genuine hurt that has Hyunjin's mind tumbling and his heart rattling.

Jisung is a raging blaze, an unforgiving fire that's moving at its own pace and Hyunjin feels like the dried vegetation, like a blade of dried up grass in his presence. Hyunjin is fuel to the fire, nothing more.

But Hyunjin is okay with that.

"I'm fine now." He tells him in a tone that's gentle but Hyunjin can hear the snap behind it. It eases him a bit, after being so unsure of what to do with such a quiet and passive Jisung.

"Physically I can do it," he presses on.

Chan slowly sits near him and everyone slithers closer. Even Changbin who's rubbing the sleep out of his eyes nears with Seungmin's tentative help.

"But mentally?" Chan pipes up. Felix's fingers land on his back then, swirling around in thoughtless patterns. Jisung gulps.

"I can do it," he states. "If anyone else doesn't feel well enough to go, then we don't have to but, we have to move at some point, right?"

Jisung craves it. His muscles twitch at the thought of a revolution and he knows he cannot sit around and wait for magic to happen. He cannot sit around and wait for himself to accept his situation because Jisung knows he won't be able right now. And maybe not for a long time. But Jisung knows time is precious. There is no way anyone can buy time. Even the richest man in the capital, the President didn't have the luxury of buying time. It flowed. Endlessly.

And Jisung will not be stupid enough to waste that.

It will take time to cross the ocean, to finally settle in a safe place and Jisung will not— he cannot— sit around and waste this precious time.

Jisung gulps.

Precious time.

The four boys may have made it out of the facility, but Jisung had seen over twenty faces in total in that place. Jeongwoo, the man who persisted to his own end, newcomers that had barely finished the first step to become a governments rat, old faces that were more than likely now in the same predicament as Jisung.

The government would've freaked out when they escaped, their most developed rats, and Jisung just knows that the boys' that still had the

luxury to live outside of the institution's walls would've been dragged in and Jisung swallows thickly.

Just how many boys had he sacrificed to get himself out?

How many young men now stood like him, growing life they should have never been able to give? Jisung's fingers gently dance around his own stomach, under his skin a life growing.

It all makes his head spin, his surroundings go blurry but the strong smell of rain clinging to Chan's skin settles his fiery nerves, the heavy presence of Minho grounds him down, alerting him to become aware of himself. The soft eyes of Seungmin that soothe out the creases from turning into cracks, the soft blanket under him that Jeongin made him, comforting and warm. Changbin looks downcast, away from Jisung and he's reminded of the space he's even, space that comforts him and allows him to breathe. Felix's soft touches, ones that leave a path of warmth in its wake, gently awakening his slumbering heart. Hyunjin's soft breathing, the quiet that tells Jisung that he's just waiting. For Jisung's opinion.

Because that matters now.

It sends an easing warmth down his body and he relaxes. Jisung breathes.

"If we reach our destination soon, that means we don't have to worry about this all," Jisung finally gets out. Hyunjin responds in a hum. Chan shuffles closer and so gently, cradles one of his hands, not like he's a porcelain doll about to crack, but more as a butterfly waiting for its wings to dry out. He might be a little vulnerable as he waits for his wings to dry, needing a little more shelter than usual, but once his wings dry, he can fly freely in that soft breeze.

Chan's hands are warm, rugged from hard work and Jisung breathes in deep. "If we're together," Jisung allows Jeongin to come curl up near him. Seungmin follows, situated between Felix and the youngest, still able to reach Jisung easily.

"Then we can do it." Jisung musters out.

And it's all seven other pairs of sparkling eyes, the wishes for safety so blatantly on the surface for them to see that stays behind Jisung's own eyelids as he settles back down.

→

They were more than capable to do it.

Now, standing on the coastline of the continent they've spent all their lives on, Jisung swallows salty air and a laugh leaves his lips.

Everyone is cheering, running into others arms, and Jisung yelps when Chan picks him up by his waist and spins him around. He grips down onto his wide shoulders and laughs, one that makes his head fall back, a laugh that sends jitters through his body, one that causes tears to prick in his eyes. Because they've done it.

The first part of their long journey now coming to an end.

Chan puts him back down and pats his cheeks, his own laughter bleeding into everyone else until the air is left filled with eight joyous laughs.

"There's still a house in really good condition!" Jeongin shouts running back to the group sitting a few hundred meters from the sandy shores. Changbin is jittery next to him and just puts two thumbs up, nodding his head.

"And there's a boat a few hundred meters away, I can't tell if you'd be able to fix it Minho... but we can only see!" Jeongin tells them.

Jeongin is more than happy to lead them back to the house, blabbing

happily as they near closer to the old bricked house that still stands. Perhaps this part of the coast hadn't been hit with destruction too much, or it had been a town abandoned much later after the Great War begun.

They all tumble in through the wooden door that Jisung guesses was once red due to the remnant of red paint faded against the dark coloured wood.

All of them except Hyunjin and Jisung, that is.

Hyunjin clutches him by his shoulders and tugs him backwards gently.

"I wanted to talk to you," he says gently. Hyunjin had seen how Jisung grew more open these past few weeks, allowing anyone to advance on him, so much so that Hyunjin had even seen him willingly cuddle up to Changbin who had continued to play with his hair with one hand, the other rubbing gentle circles on his hipbone. He and Felix were still almost attached to the hip, but it had warmed Hyunjin's heart to see him so relaxed around them now.

Hyunjin had even noticed changes in his behaviour towards himself, too. But Hyunjin was too used to advancing Jisung with extreme caution that it doesn't leave him so easily.

Jisung would've scoffed at him before and just walked away, but he looks back at him, his eyes soft but Hyunjin can see he's tired, too.

"What is it?" He asks and it's gentle, no bite of hostility in his tone. Hyunjin relaxes his tensed muscles.

Hyunjin then grins at him.

"Thank you," he mutters first. "For believing in us first," He then elaborates when Jisung cocks his head.

Jisung turns his head away and smiles softly, his fingers cling onto the hem of his dirtied shirt. "We're family now," Jisung mumbles and it's so quiet that Hyunjin has to lean in so slightly.

The tips of the shorter's ears are red, his cheeks lightly flushed and

Hyunjin is a fool. A fool for pink cheeks and the soft plush flesh of reddened lips, a fool for eyes that sparkle in the sunlight and that glow underneath the moonlight.

“Even us?” Hyunjin finds himself whispering and those moonlit eyes stare back at up at him. Jisung hums softly and Hyunjin's heart swells.

“I thought...” Hyunjin clears his throat and shuffles in his spot. He pulls at his clothing that's creased. “I thought we were still on bad terms, is all,” he blabbers out. He looks down at Jisung who nods in understanding.

“It's been a while now, hasn't it?” Jisung muses gently. “Almost three months, Hyunjin. And that might not sound like a lot of time, but to me... it feels like this is the years that I couldn't live and each day—I'm not the best at managing all my emotions or communicating... but I'm trying,” he breathes in deep and looks back up at Hyunjin. Hyunjin tries to gulp down the rock building in his throat.

“Maybe I'm better at managing my emotions more than I think... but my hate for you,” Hyunjin sucks in a deep breath and Jisung winces. “I can't sugarcoat it...” Jisung tells him. “I did hate you. Truly. Maybe I've grown out of that hate, or maybe it's because I don't have the energy to hate you... and that I can't,”

Hyunjin shuffles forwards.

It's good enough for him. He doesn't hate him, and even if it's a symptom of the fatigue that plagues them, Hyunjin will take it because he doesn't know if he could live with himself while Jisung loathes him as he did.

Hyunjin's a fool. A complete fool that finds moonlit eyes mesmerising, the soft breath that pushes through plush lips draws him closer.

“I've never once hated you,” Hyunjin tells him and Jisung scoffs so lightly. “I know,” he answers. “You don't have to tell me that,”

“I'll never be able to hate you,” Hyunjin begins to talk fast because

even if Jisung doesn't hate him, there's still the chance that he doesn't stand him enough to put up with his confessions. Tears prick in his eyes and Hyunjin feels useless in his presence because he shouldn't be crying over something so... Hyunjin cannot call this futile because it's Jisung that's standing before him, watching him so intently. It's about Jisung and his feelings.

"Are you crying?" Jisung questions gently and Hyunjin can only nod once, sniffing as he allows for it to flow out.

How much had he wanted to cry over this? How much had he wished to cry himself to sleep, feeling sorry for himself that he was hated by the person his heart had decided to want? Hyunjin's heart is beating hard, his blood pumping and warming him up or maybe it's just the sudden swirl of emotions?

"I could never hate you. No matter what you do, even if you turn out to want to burn everything down to the ground," Hyunjin doesn't notice the slight tensing of Jisung's body then. "Because in my eyes," he takes in a shuddering breath. "You will never be anything less than wonderful,"

Jisung's breath hitches and he looks up, peering at him almost and when Hyunjin spots the beginnings of a frown he rambles again.

"And maybe you think I'm insane, but I can't help it. Maybe you'll despise me more now— but somehow I don't care, because I want you to know because I can't go on any longer and pretend that I don't feel the way I do for you,"

"Hyunjin..."

"If you say no, then I'll stop right now, okay? So you tell me, Jisung?"

He stops then and his heart pounds in his ears, almost deafening as he waits for a response.

But all Jisung does is smile up at him and he shrugs. "I've never had the chance to hear anything like this," Jisung tells him. "I'd like you to continue, actually,"

And if Hyunjin wasn't already sinking fast enough, he's suddenly pulled down deeper into the abyss that Jisung is.

"I like you," he gets out and maybe Hyunjin acts against his own will, but Hyunjin has thought about this too many times for it to be a simple innocent involuntary action.

His hands itch, burn to hold him and when his palms land on his hips, smaller hands brace against his chest and Hyunjin spirals right down.

And he swoops down, connecting plush lips together.

Jisung burns in his hold, too otherworldly, too sacred for him or anyone else. But Hyunjin kisses him, his thumbs digging into his hips and Hyunjin's heart jumps in his chest when the frozen boy responds, ever so gently but Jisung doesn't pull back, but kisses him softly, drawing out the hidden sweetness of his mouth.

Hyunjin kicks himself the moment they pull away. Jisung's eyes are wide, glazed and Hyunjin is so stupid because he had never asked. Apologises fly off his tongue rapidly, asking for forgiveness between his self-deprecation.

But all Jisung does is turn to walk inside the house and he gives him a tiny pursed smile. "Just ask next time," He says before leaving Hyunjin in a complete frenzy.

"Next time!?"

→

When Seungmin sees Jisung enter the room Jeongin had claimed as their own, he gives him a soft smile and opens his arms, allowing the smaller to settle gently into his embrace.

"You're tired?" Seungmin asks as Jisung drops his head onto his shoulder. Jisung only hums and allows both Felix and Jeongin to cuddle up to them, joining the cuddle pile.

"Careful," Seungmin whispers, sprawling a hand over his swelling abdomen. Jisung sighs at the warmth and Seungmin hums in content, slowly moving his thumb over his clothed skin.

Over the few weeks, Jisung had watched as his belly grow, bloating and then turning into a small bump on his otherwise flat stomach. Jisung had froze a few days ago when he realised he was far past the seventh week, past the week that he had lost the last pregnancy and relief had filled him this time, different to that feeling of fear and despair when the pregnancy first was discovered.

"How are you feeling now?" Felix mutters, reaching out to put his hand on Jisung's stomach as well. "I'm okay," Jisung murmurs.

"That's good..." he mutters.

"But how are you feeling about the baby now... I know you felt a little... apprehensive before,"

Jisung turns his head to look at Felix and he bites down on his lip. "I feel... it's not an ideal situation," he begins and Jisung slowly sits up, their hands falling off his tummy. "But I don't hate it... but I don't think," he swallows thickly.

"I don't really think I'd be able to deal with it all very well... like how am I supposed to have a baby potentially in an unknown space and take care of it? How? What if I can't love it? What if I do hate it?" Jisung looks down at his fingers. "I feel sick to my stomach... because I hate it, but I can't help myself but feel so... what the fuck, I shouldn't say motherly because that's not right but I can't help it!"

Seungmin allows him to turn and sob into his chest. It had become something he did quite often nowadays. Being overrun with hormones has caused him to sob frequently, wanting someone near him and comfort him. Seungmin, Felix and Chan have been the main ones he went to, but Jeongin would always wander over and rub his back for him, which he does now.

“Sungie,” Jeongin says softly. “I know it’s really hard and we understand all these feeling you’re having,” he whispers to him. Jisung sniffs and nods. Seungmin cradles his head. Felix sits back a little bit, watching. “And when you have the baby, we’re going to be there for you. We won’t leave and I know for sure, I will do whatever I can do to help you both out, okay? You’re not alone and you never will be. Whether that helps or not...” Jisung lifts his head and nods, reaching out to squeeze the youngest’s hand.

“But a baby is a gift, too,” Felix murmurs.

Jisung wipes his tears away and scoffs loudly. “For the government, maybe,”

Felix frowns at him.

“You’re acting strange,” Jisung then tells him with a small frown of his own.

And to everyone's surprise, Felix gets up and leaves the small, unfurnished room without a word.

Jeongin lets out a sound of surprise and rises but Seungmin tugs on the hem of his shirt and shakes his head.

“I think Jisung should handle that one instead...” Jeongin pouts but he plonks next to Seungmin and gives Jisung a pat on his belly before he leaves.

“I’ll try my best,” Jisung mumbles softly.

Jisung wanders out of the room and passes Hyunjin who flushes brightly as soon as he sees him. Jisung just zooms past, his own ears flushing when he remembers the feeling of lips against his own mouth, but Jisung will have to deal with that later when his mind is clearer and he can think about options he can give himself.

“Hey,” Jisung says. Felix is outside, watching the waves of the ocean that peaks out through the gap in the trees.

“I don’t really want to talk to you right now?” Felix says.

"But that's the thing," Jisung grunts and he sits down next to him. "Why? I didn't do anything for you? Did I?"

Felix sighs. "It's just... I know you're stressed and all about the baby, and I know this might sound so bad but I don't think... I think you might be overthinking everything too much,"

Jisung frowns. "What?"

"It's just you can't accept it. It might not even be as bad as you think, Jisung... it's a baby and like Jeongin said if you don't like them, we're willing to—"

"Don't forget this is still my baby," Jisung hisses. He frowns deeply at Felix. He understands where he's coming from, but to sound so insensitive about what Jisung feels for the baby is a little too far across the line for him.

"I know that? But how you speak about Seungmin, Jeongin, myself... we were in the facility and you act like we didn't suffer. Just because they favoured you for some reason... why would they push you to get pregnant over us?"

And anger boils over in Jisung.

"Why were they so obsessed with me, do you think?" Jisung sneers and Felix flinches back from him. "Because if they knocked you up over me, you could have a say. You could go out if you had guardians, you didn't have to stay locked up." It's a cold blow because Felix has mentioned before his parents had passed and he had been locked up ever since. "You could've fought for your babies futures. You could hold them! You could do all that! You could've..." His voice falters.

"Because you were a person to them still. You didn't belong to them like I belonged to them, and because of that, I had to watch them mutate me further and impregnate me more than once. And," Jisung lets out a choked cry. "I had to watch myself fail. I had to lay there in my own blood while I miscarried, so yeah!" His voice heightens through his sobs. "Maybe I am sensitive and maybe indifferent about you and the others because I envy you so much!"

Felix sucks in a deep breath and he stiffens at the sudden confession. Felix's vision tunnels and he imagines a smaller Jisung, clutching onto red sheets and crying hysterically. Felix finds his words fail him because even though he might be a little angry at his friend for thinking he was insensitive... all his friend has been doing is struggling through the thick mud of trauma that will not leave him even if he wishes for it for years and years.

Felix suddenly feels like the indifferent one instead.

"I wish every day that I had fought because it wasn't fair. I thought I would be better off dead instead of living through all those horrors." Felix's jaw is shaking, his lips pursed tightly and his throat constricts he tries to keep his cries down. "I wake up in the middle of the night after having nightmares of losing my babies that are just born, the memory of losing that first baby I had the chance to grow. And I hate it."

"We're your friends, Jisung," Felix mutters out. "And I'm so sorry that happened to you. I don't even know what to say... but you sometimes make me feel like I'm your enemy instead,"

"Because in a way you are," Jisung spits.

"You think you had it hard too, and that's perfectly fine but if you try one more time to try to push your 'positive' agenda on me, I'm not going to hold back ever again,"

Felix blinks at him. "You could at least respect my opinion!" He shouts back. He wants to hold him and ask if he's okay, but he's worked up. Shaken to the core at the sudden realisation that Jisung was different to him. To the rest of them. Jisung was never free once, not like how Felix had a choice. Felix feels shaky.

"Or you could finally wake up and realise whenever you talk about it all I can think about is all the pain I went through!"

Felix's bottom lip wobbles. "And I'm really sorry that happened to you," He blubbers out but he shakes his head. He's crying hard now. "But we suffered too,"

Jisung scoffs and throws his head back. “And when did I say you didn’t?”

Felix doesn’t know what overcomes him, but he’s only human and he’s susceptible to overflowing with emotion and acting out, without thinking it through first.

And as soon as he thrusts his palms out, shoving his friend to the ground, Felix freezes in absolute horror.

Jisung cries out as he hits the ground. It rips through the air when he takes a shuddering breath and seconds later, Hyunjin is storming out and by Jisung’s side. He glares at Felix who’s standing there, wide-eyed and shaking in shock.

“Jisung, hey, hey,” Hyunjin grips him by his shoulders gently and picks him up off of the ground. “My shoulder,” Jisung hisses and just as Chan and Minhø burst out, he breaks out into fat tears, sobbing to go inside. Minhø is the one to reach out and begin taking Jisung back inside with him. Hyunjin stares at Felix for a few seconds before following, his eyes going wide at the blood soaking through Jisung shirt.

There’s a long shard of what looks like old glass jammed in his skin near his shoulder blade and Hyunjin sprints forward, leaving Felix and Chan outside.

“Lix?” Chan mutters to the shaking boy. Felix swallows and his knees buckle, causing him to fall into the dirt beneath him. Chan frowns and makes his way over, his hands landing on his back and the moment they touch, Felix finally bursts into tears.

“I didn’t mean to!” He cries out and all Chan can do is pull him into his lap, allowing his tears to wet his shirt. “I got so mad and not even at him because the whole world just isn’t fair! And I hurt him! He told me things and I should’ve hugged him instead of pushing him,” he wails.

Chan tugs him even closer, burying his nose into the blondes soft hair. They’d washed two days ago and Felix still seemed rather clean,

considering the last stretch of their trip. “What if I hurt the baby, too?” He wails.

“Lix, just breathe,” Chan whispers to him. But Felix cries harder, falling into the abyss of wallowing guilt because Jisung, the same young man that has been through hell and back, the same boy who carried the moon's rays in his eyes that are beginning to fill up with life, the boy that tenderly helps him every time his cycle comes, ignoring his own abdomen swollen with life in favour of nurturing him with such a soft smile and tentative hands. Jisung is a fire struggling to roar and Felix has become the snow, accidentally causing the flickering ember to struggle even further to burn.

And Felix's heart has torn into two because Jisung deserves so much more than snow. Jisung deserves to grow with his own pace and he deserves water lapping nearby incase his flame grows too hot for him to handle.

But Felix is the snow. Not the water to protect him.

Felix passes out in Chan's arms, his breathing too laboured and thick with tears to keep him conscious. But Chan holds him tenderly, giving him the comfort he believes he doesn't deserve, but Felix will never be the snow for long, instead, he will become the sunshine again, encouraging Jisung to glow and burn brighter than anything else in this god-forsaken world.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE!!

to celebrate a new year i decided to post a chapter!!
there will still be one on Sunday, not to worry!! i
hope everyone has a nice year and it is kind to them
<333 thank you so so much again for all the support
and all the kind words u guys are insane i just want
to give you this whole fic ahhhh

<3333

[my twt!](#)

15. 14→

Notes for the Chapter:

TW mentions death and infant death!

Jisung's cries turn into soft sniffles as Hyunjin settles him down on the tiled floor.

"What were you even talking about to get into that situation?" Hyunjin murmurs and Jisung breathes deeply.

"We were just being insensitive to each other, I guess..."

Hyunjin hums. "So it's complicated?" Jisung nods and hisses loudly when Hyunjin gently pulls at the glass in his skin. "It didn't have to be," he groans at the stinging pain in his shoulder.

"Do you have any other injuries or this is?" Hyunjin quickly changes the subject, but he's still relieved when Jisung shakes his head no. "Well, that's a bonus," Hyunjin murmurs. "Do you want to bite down on anything? This one might hurt more than the blackberry bush," And Jisung whines out loudly at that, but nods his head and Hyunjin quickly offers one of the other clean rags he had in the medical kit.

Jisung flinches forwards, cursing loudly as Hyunjin extracts the glass from his back.

"All done," Hyunjin finally says after a few minutes. "It took longer because it must've broken when you fell on it," He tells him. Jisung is panting, his head hanging down. Jisung doesn't even bother to ask why Hyunjin lifts his shirt because moments later a cool damp cloth is pressed against the wound, cleaning it.

Jisung looks down at his exposed stomach and gently draws circles on it, humming to himself, trying to ignore the searing cut on his shoulder.

"I've passed twelve weeks," Jisung murmurs and Hyunjin's touch on his shoulder lightens slightly. "Oh," Hyunjin breathes out.

"Usually... usually that means it will stick once you hit twelve weeks, right?" Jisung asks in a small whisper. His palms flatten on his abdomen.

"I'm pretty sure," Hyunjin answers back.

Jisung frowns gently and puts a little more pressure on his stomach, but nothing happens just yet. There's no movement, nothing to tell him he's carrying a little flutter except the little bump and some typical symptoms.

Jisung thinks about Jeongin's offer, and how Seungmin had caressed his belly so tenderly and Felix's obvious support but his envy.

"I'm going to have a baby..." Jisung whispers and even though he's known this for weeks now, it frightens him all over again, because he's made it out of the danger stage which heightens the possibility Jisung will be holding a squirming little flutter in only a few months. It makes his heart shake in his chest and he bites down on his lip.

"Yeah," Hyunjin gently slips one side of Jisung's shirt off his body. His skin pricks up at the sudden chill, but Jisung doesn't shiver. Hyunjin works quickly and thoroughly to bandage his shoulder and once he's done, he settles in front of Jisung.

"That's scary," Jisung murmurs lowly and he slowly lifts his gaze from his still exposed stomach. Hyunjin gently reaches for one of his hands and clutches onto it, cradling it in his much larger hand. Jisung's eyes find Hyunjin's.

"My body isn't made for this," Jisung begins and Hyunjin stays quiet, allowing the younger to talk. "They may of given me a womb and the 'ability' to birth them, but who's to say it's going to work? What happens if they can't fit because my body isn't designed to birth?" Jisung's eyes flicker with terror. "Is that what happened?"

Hyunjin tenses and frowns.

“Jeongwoo,” Jisung says and heat flashes through Hyunjin's body. “Is that what happened to him and his baby? They died Hyunjin.” He deadpans and he clutches onto Hyunjin's hand tighter.

Hyunjin's mouth goes dry. “How... how did you know that?”

Jisung's face contorts into one that shows despair and Hyunjin's heart clenches.

“The day after they died,” Jisung mutters. “I heard nurses talking about them in the halls when I was going to the gardens,”

Hyunjin licks his lips quickly and then shakes his head. “They didn't die because Jeongwoo couldn't birth the baby,” he admits. “The baby was born with the cord around its neck... it was stillborn because of that we think,” Jisung's stomach churns violently. “And Jeongwoo?”

Hyunjin cups Jisung's small swell with his other hand. His hand easily engulfs the bump and it oddly comforts Jisung, like he too is protecting the little flutter.

“We believe he developed preeclampsia...he was already gone by the time doctors arrived...” Hyunjin is quiet, hesitant to tell Jisung this in case he scares him, but Jisung doesn't let fear flash through his eyes. But Hyunjin will never be sure what Jisung is feeling or thinking.

Jisung purses his lips. “What if something similar happens to me?”

“Jisung,” Hyunjin touch becomes heavier on his body. “I will always be here and I will always prioritise your health before anything else, okay? I'm not going to let you get hurt, alright?”

Jisung shuffles closer and meekly reaches his hands out, grasping at Hyunjin's neck as he slowly moves even closer. Hyunjin's hand slips from his stomach, raking around to grip at his hip. “When you said I had to ask next time,” Hyunjin's breath fans across his mouth. Jisung's body tingles at the remembrance of Hyunjin's touch, his kisses and Jisung is starved of touch that sets his body alight. “Did you mean it?”

“Ask and find out,” Jisung whispers back.

“Then,” Hyunjin gulps, his eyes fall down to his lips. “May I kiss you?”

“You may,”

And Jisung's body responds with waves of shuddering warmth when soft lips land on his. He mightn't feel the same way about Hyunjin as Hyunjin does for him, the thought nags in the back of his mind but this feeling— the intimate touch of another causes his heart to race and a warm coil in his belly grows. Jisung allows the wandering touches of Hyunjin against his bare skin, allows the sudden rougher tug to the taller boys lap because it makes him feel alive.

It fills the empty void of his too-hollow life and Jisung will allow himself get intoxicated off soft kisses that turn into harsh nips at his lips all because it fills him up, feeding him on life he's missed out on for too long.

→

When Chan had first thought of the plan to break out the boys from the institution, he didn't think he'd have to deal with such frail relationships.

He should've, really because who can blame the boys? Being locked away for so long had done obvious damage, so much Chan struggles to think how it will be mended.

But Chan is persistent and these boys are now his family. Jeongin thrives from physical affection and he's lively bright but the kid is mature, desensitised from things kids his age would typically fear. Seungmin craves to be needed, like Hyunjin but Chan sees how much happier he is if he's able to give out affection or comfort.

And Jisung is complicated. He thrives off nothing, doesn't crave anything but freedom and the will to make his own decisions. But he's strong, fortified by years of torture and Chan will be the last person to ever cross over to his bad side because he's an ember, a flickering flame that at any second will roar into an inferno. That strength, Chan can see but Jisung doubts himself still. He's mysterious and Chan would like to comfort him too, but Jisung is different.

But Felix, he's an open book. If something is wrong, he's willing to talk, and truthfully out of all of them, Felix has the best ways to cope because he's not afraid to express himself or talk, and Chan finds that admirable in itself.

Felix has his doubts too, about himself but he overcomes them quickly.

But now, Chan knows he needs a lot more comfort than he alone can give.

Felix is only human, like the rest of them. He had snapped at Jisung. Chan doesn't blame him for losing his temper because he knows Jisung is adamant and frustrating because he's so hard to understand, and Felix, the sunshine incarnate had hit a limit he himself didn't know he had.

Felix draws Chan in, with sparkly eyes and freckled cheeks and a sweet smile. He leaks with sunshine, filling the cracks in their mixed family with a little bit of light.

Chan loves all of them dearly. His friend since his early childhood—Minho, his friends he made during the outbreak—Changbin, Hyunjin. And the four boys they had rescued from a life of cruelty—Seungmin, Felix, Jeongin and Jisung.

They all had a place in his heart, cocooned there and safe but Felix digs his cocoon deeper, into a part of his heart that's territory is uncharted.

As unknown as it is, Felix is warm, beautiful and Chan will gladly allow him to dig as deep as he likes, and maybe, just maybe Chan

will fall.

→

Felix apologises to Jisung the moment he sees him cuddled into Seungmin's side and surprisingly enough, Jisung cries and flings himself into Felix's hold, muttering apologies one after the other until Seungmin eases him back down with soft touches against his back.

Felix and Jisung then act as if nothing has happened between them, but when Jisung leans back a little too hard against Seungmin he groans out in pain and Felix's face contorts with clear guilt and worry.

"Hey," Hyunjin wanders down the staircase and cocks his head at Jisung.

"We should wash up and clean the dirty clothes since we're here for a bit," he tells Chan who nods, swallowing the rest of the food he was eating.

"Jisung," Hyunjin calls and he gets the attention of all three boys on the beaten up lounge. Jisung wiggles out of Seungmin's grip and wanders over to him. "Come with me?" He sounds slightly unsure as to if Jisung is going to reject him as if they weren't just all over each other last night.

"Okay," Jisung just shrugs and waits for Hyunjin at the door as the taller shifts the bag across his back.

Chan peers over at the two boys on the lounge and gapes. "Since when were they civil?" He squawks out but Felix can only shake his head in disbelief and Seungmin looks rather confused himself.

“I’m going to go see how the other three are going with the boat parts...” Seungmin murmurs.

→

There’s a dilemma.

The boat they had found was in decent shape considering its age and the periods it had survived, but it had many bits missing. It was a fear they faced, worried the extra time it would take for Minhø to craft new bits would cause their mission to fail.

They had looked all together for almost two whole weeks looking for parts and when they had finally run out of places to check, Minhø had sat down at the oceans shore and stared out. Jisung had sat down with him, finding comfort in the silence.

“It’s going to take a while,” Minhø had said.

But Jisung had only shrugged, “I trust you,”

Minhø has seen how Jisung had slowly grown more comfortable around everyone else, including Hyunjin and something bitter in his mouth had appeared when he realised that. Not that he wanted Jisung to hate Hyunjin because Hyunjin is his friend and deserves to be treated nicely, but because they spent so much time together these days while Minhø is working hard to make custom pieces for this damned boat.

Felix’s and Jisung’s birthdays had passed with small celebrations but they had both cried over finally spending a birthday outside of the facility.

Jisung wanders over from time to time, cool drinks in his hand for Minhø who sweats as he works in the warming summer seasons.

Sometimes it was cool water with crushed berries, other times lime juice in water, but every time Jisung would pass it to him with one hand on his growing abdomen and with a soft smile that melts Minho's heart.

Minho knows he's stupid for even thinking of wanting Jisung, but he's rigged edges that mould into soft curves, wide eyes that are slowly filling up and brimming with sparkling oceans of emotions. He's a roaring fire that Minho craves to hold, feel his skin burn his palms as he holds him close to his body. And each breath he lets out is sweet, feeding the growing fire inside of him.

Jisung is one of the reasons he leaves the house in the early mornings and leaves in the late night, working all day to try to fix this boat that will take them across the ocean, into a safe land filled with promises.

Minho will do anything in his power to get this boat to move them across the ocean, cradling that hope for safety in his nimble fingers.

→

It's the middle of the night when Jisung wakes with a start. Minho is next to him on his right and he jerks awake from the movement.

He's wide-eyed and his hands are clutching at his stomach. "Jisung?" Minho calls out, concerned that something has gone wrong. "Are you in pain? Are you okay?"

"I'm okay," He croaks out but there's unshed terror in his eyes. "I think it just moved... the baby,"

"Oh," Minho breathes out in relief. He looks at Jisung who bites down on his lower lip and presses a little harder on his stomach

before gasping, eyes shining as he looks over to Minho. “They’re alive,” he cries in a whisper and Minho's mind circuits.

“Of course they are,” He whispers back, but his stomach swirls with fear from the boy's words. And when a tear drips down Jisung's cheek, Minho just knows it's not anything he'll question him on. “Thank goodness,” he mumbles under his breath, settling back down. Minho follows and once he's gotten himself comfortable, Jisung wiggles into his arms, his forehead resting on his chest. Minho sucks in a breath, unsure how to handle it, but Jisung gently grabs his hand and moves it to his swollen middle, humming in content.

And it's this moment as Jisung's small frame is pressed against him that Minho realises the feelings he built for this young man are staying, not budging even if Jisung tries to burn them down.

Minho's blood sings at the proximity of them pressed together. Jisung falls asleep easily but Minho is left awake, his blood warm in his veins and the tiny pulsating movements against his calloused palm luring him into a peaceful sleep.

→

When Seungmin looks at Jisung something swells in his heart, but his stomach crashes at the same time.

Jisung is an enigma. Soft edges that fade into bleeding, jagged messes inside, but Seungmin finds him quickly becoming one of his most valued friends he's ever had.

Seungmin thinks and thinks over the hours he has to himself when they walked for hours, days, weeks, months Seungmin had thought.

He had looked over his life so far and something had shifted so

drastically inside him.

Seungmin was born lucky. Luck that had never bled out, that he still held onto to this very moment in his life.

He was born to a single mother, a young woman who's eyes held wonders of the world, glittered with such love that it burned brightly in the surface of her brown eyes. She wasn't rich, she wasn't poor, but she was never a lucky woman.

Seungmin thinks maybe he had sucked all of her luck when he was born.

She was the most beautiful woman Seungmin has ever seen, perhaps he's just biased because it's his mother, but Seungmin has truly yet to see a woman of such effortless beauty.

She was hardworking, always pushing herself to her limits to care for him. Long laborious days at work to provide shelter and food to fill her son's stomach had never ended. But she was lovely, so lovely. She had never snapped but always held Seungmin like he was a precious treasure, a priceless gift from heavenly beings.

Seungmin's childhood was quiet, ever so peaceful and he was showered in unconditional love from his mother. She was patient, understanding and always put him first.

And when he grew up, the love never slowed, it was consistent and Seungmin gave it back to her, never going one day without reminding her that he loved her just as much as she loved him.

Seungmin grew and grew and with time, the world fell into shambles.

His mother had never had much, Seungmin knew that and when he first saw the posters, he had thought about his mother, and briefly wondered if she would love his children just as much as him.

He had brought a poster home on his way home from school the next day.

His mother had known poverty, loss, hopelessness before him and when he stumbled into her warm embrace, asking what her wish was, Seungmin had made up his mind before he could even think over the consequences.

She wished for grandchildren as she smiled down at him, wishing for chubby cheeks like he did as a baby. A large family filled with joy.

And Seungmin was a fool for his mother.

So, he entered, on his mother's terms as well as his own.

The process hurt, but he was lucky.

But now that he has met Jisung and the others, he realises just how lucky he has been. He would go home to his mother after medical procedures, and his mother would take care of him, now supported with an inflow of money from the government to look after him well, she didn't have to spend long days out in the burning fields at the farms. He would fall asleep in his mother's arms, held tightly when the throbbing of the growing organ grew too much, rocked back to sleep when the pain meds finally kicked in.

Seungmin wasn't alone during any of that. She was always right by his side, always caring for him until he was deemed ready and able to have a child.

Seungmin was eighteen when they locked him up in the facility. He had no contact with his mother and the attachment he had to her was strong and Seungmin tried his best to see her again, but it was always the same answer.

Over those months he was locked up he met the other boys that were currently in a similar predicament. And suddenly, this process of creating a fulfilling life for his mother was dark and grim, not bright and joyful like they had thought.

Seungmin has never been a fool, and when his implantation was scheduled, he had realised this was a life he would never escape from. It had dawned on him quickly that he was never getting out, all he was to them was a rabbit, a vessel to fill the world back up again.

Seungmin was always described as dainty from teachers, peers, but he had hardened, slowly turning to stone in that cold place and just before the stone could encase his heart, Chan had burst through his door.

Seungmin had suffered. He felt so suffocated he left with the seven other boys without even thinking about running to his mother. Maybe because he had already lost hope and realised how fucked up and corrupt the government really is?

He still thinks of his mother. How she is doing? Has she lived through the disease? How is she coping without him to hold and whisper loving words to at night now?

Seungmin can still feel the heavy weight of the facility deep in his bones.

And when he looks at Jisung, his heart just breaks over and over again.

Jisung had survived pure hell.

Seungmin was lucky.

But Jisung was never lucky and whenever he catches his eye or settles his frail body next to his larger, healthier frame, Seungmin feels this urge to take care of him, smother him in love he hasn't had. Jisung takes it gladly now, enjoys the fingers that rake through his hair that caress him into a dull sleep.

When Seungmin reaches out for the boys growing middle, he begs himself to not shatter because it's not fair at all. Life has fucked Jisung over and over again, never giving him a rest and now, with this baby growing inside of him, Seungmin feels like he could kneel over and implode in an earth-shattering way.

Seungmin was lucky, getting out just before he could scum to a similar fate as Jisung, but Seungmin knows his heart is lighter than Jisung's, less marred than the smaller's. Sometimes he wished it was him instead, wanting to take some of his pain away but Seungmin thinks it's silly, too.

He can't change this fate that has cursed them all, but he can care for him, love on him, make sure he knows he'll never be alone anymore. Seungmin will gladly take care of the baby if he asks him to because, in a twisted way, Seungmin cannot put himself first in this situation, not when Jisung, the living breathing epitome of resilience lived right by him.

Jisung is an enigma, a boy that's too close to exploding into millions of fragments and Seungmin is simply lucky.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

hii everyone!! this chapter is important for the dynamics of their friendship and how the boys experiences affected them. it is honestly quite problematic atm but i can say it does get resolved/ things eventually get better!!

Thanks again for leaving the nicest comments !! i love you guys



[my twt!](#)

Notes for the Chapter:

Tw! Small mention of weight loss

Time goes by, and with time comes growth. Like the seedlings that popped up in the soil Jeongin tilled with Changbin, now tall and producing, Jisung has felt the growth of his own flutter.

Over the months it takes of Minho's hard work, Jisung works hard himself to find strength in himself to finally sort out his emotions.

Jisung watches himself grow. His stomach stretches outwards each day, expanding with the growth of his flutter and it causes a churn of his stomach, a total whirlwind of emotion because Jisung knows it's so... unnatural but he finds himself mesmerised by himself and the flutter that nestles comfortably inside of him.

He definitely doesn't hate it. Even though once it had alerted him of its presence, Jisung has never been able to catch a break since, but Jisung only finds it strangely endearing. It's strange.

The once fluttering movements, tiny pulses that wiggled in his lower abdomen became stronger, more distinct, larger until it was no more a movement like a like fluttering butterfly, but a clear whoosh of limbs. He can pinpoint feet to hands, where their legs wiggle around, and where their head lays against him.

Sleeping becomes harder and Jisung cannot go long between bathroom breaks anymore, much to his annoyance. Sleeping was worse because he had steadily become used to sleeping nestled in someone's arms but the younger boys have trouble holding him so close due to the new obstacle that is his expanding middle, so he must either settle with Chan, Changbin, Minho or Hyunjin.

Chan becomes his comfort at night.

Minho comes in too late from working on the boat for him to nestle up to him, but Minho still makes something swirl in his stomach,

something that doesn't ease him, but makes him alert, as if his survival instincts are turning on. Changbin sleeps as if he's fighting bears in his sleep and the one night he had tried, he'd awoken to a solid slap to his abdomen that he had made him cry out of shock. Changbin still didn't seem to forgive himself and sleeps as far away as possible from him.

And Hyunjin is Hyunjin. Jisung doesn't mind his touch at all if he did he wouldn't allow him to steal kisses and suck the breath out of him, but Hyunjin fails to hold him for long periods, either getting too hot with summer now fallen on them or because he can't take his touch too much longer.

But Chan is always selfless and puts everyone before himself, and it makes something inside Jisung so blue. Chan is too good for this world, and it hurts Jisung's heart whenever he sees him working hard in the garden with Jeongin, or assisting Minho with the boat, going hunting with Changbin or helping Seungmin with cooking meals. And Chan has never failed once to tuck Jisung in his warm embrace, caressing him into sleep. He always comes back and holds him after Jisung's many bathroom breaks.

Jisung knows he's beginning to create a connection with his flutter, and as scared as he is to accept that, he allows himself to because maybe it won't be as bad as what he thinks?

Weeks tick by and Jisung still goes out every day to make sure Minho eats and drinks plenty and leaves feeling pleasantly satisfied knowing Minho is being taken care of. He helps Seungmin with cooking meals, but Seungmin doesn't let him near the stove of the last extravaganza of him almost burning the kitchen down.

Months trickle by and a weight of panic slowly sits inside of Jisung because they've never stopped for this long. Hyunjin had warned him and he had previously known it would take a long time even before they left for Mydar— even if the place exists— and he had taken that risk with the rest of him. But then, he wasn't aware of the flutter gently sitting inside of him. If they got caught now, Jisung would genuinely rather die.

The beings of a bond between him and his baby would be useless and

the thought of losing his baby right after birth and never seeing them, never naming them, never knowing what their future held would render him useless and completely hollow.

But Jisung said he trusted Minho, and he does. Each day he wanders out with his lunch, he sees the improvement he's making on the old boat, trying his hardest to protect them all in his own way. Jisung does trust him, but Jisung has always been a pessimist.

Hyunjin gently moves past him as he's bent down at the bank of the lake, washing clothes. "You should probably be resting a bit more than what you've been doing," Hyunjin tells him as he takes laundry from his pile into his own. "I'm still useful, I'm not dying, Hyunjin,"

"You just look really uncomfortable," he whispers and Jisung scoffs. "Maybe if you had a baby kicking their limbs up into your ribs and bladder all day you'd look like me," Hyunjin grimaces. "I can give you a massage later?" He offers and Jisung rolls his eyes at him.

"I know that's an excuse for you to kiss me," Jisung tells him and Hyunjin snorts. "Is it that obvious?"

"You think you're slick," Jisung laughs at him. "But perhaps a massage would be nice. My back is beginning to hurt quite a lot,"

"Heh," Hyunjin laughs softly. "Maybe that's an excuse for you to kiss me,"

"Don't falter yourself, Hyunjin," Jisung sings out his scold and Hyunjin laughs heartily.

"But you do know that you're pretty much six months along now," Jisung turns his head to Hyunjin and bites on his bottom lip. "It took almost three months to reach this place... and now it has taken three months to fix this boat,"

"Six months... half a year," Jisung whispers. He flattens his hand across his stomach. "That's half a year out of the facility... they really can't find us. They don't know how to track us down..." Hyunjin reaches for his hand and gives it a squeeze. "This is the first six months of the rest of your life you'll live with freedom," he tells him

and a smile blooms across Jisung's face, so pure, happy that Hyunjin can only stare like a fool.

"I like being free," he whispers.

→

Many people over the course of Jisung's young life have told him nothing is for free.

It didn't matter what it was, you always had to pay back in one way or another. In the institution, Jisung had to pay for being there, giving his body unwillingly to the sake of humanities future. Jisung had to give up his spot between his parents for his unborn sister, paying for something he didn't have any fault in creating. He had given too much, not receiving anything back throughout his eighteen years of life.

But Jisung thinks it's all bullshit anyway.

Maybe it's societies views because now Jisung does not have to give anything that he doesn't want.

When Hyunjin's lips brush past his own, his back softly pressing into the wooden beam that supports the house they currently live in, Jisung doesn't necessarily need to give anything back. He doesn't need to kiss him back if he doesn't want to, but Jisung does because it's his choice to.

When Changbin fixes his stool he's been using while helping Seungmin, Jisung doesn't need to go and fix the creaky chair Changbin prefers to use, because Changbin would simply prefer doing it. When Jeongin gifts him blankets and new clothing with shorter sleeves, Jisung doesn't need to go and find him summer items because it's unnecessary.

But there's a fine line between owing someone and looking after someone, Jisung finds.

When Chan can't sleep at night, Jisung will make him a warm tea that soothes the eldest's weight that he's bearing across his broad shoulders, allow his fingers to dance across his stomach filling with life, because Chan views it in almost the exact way Jisung sees it himself. He's disturbed by the past— the procedures that Jisung had to go through to reach this stage, but there's wonder behind his sleepy eyes whenever he feels the flutter, whenever he sees them twist and tumble around inside his body. He finds it despicable, how it came to be but it's so difficult to not be in awe of what it has achieved.

Jisung used to stick to himself, in the corners of the camps, away from the others, afraid of company or maybe— now that Jisung looks back, he truly didn't care enough. He was self-centred because all he could care about was getting out, but Jisung was already so disconnected it didn't finally click until the first night Felix had cried.

Something had clicked then, the sonder had filled him and Jisung has slowly unravelled from there on, understanding that life is so much more than trying to not suffocate on the feelings trying to kill him.

Jisung would have never helped Chan back to sleep, wouldn't have brought Minho's lunch and refreshments every day, allowed Hyunjin to kiss him because it brought pleasure to the both of them mere months ago.

Progress.

Jisung's baby isn't the only thing that's growing.

When Minho finally hesitantly reaches out for the first time, his palm flat to the highest point of his expanding middle, Jisung smiles soft, not hissing like he did when Minho saved them when he jumped off that mountain three months ago.

The real growth comes from the mind, the heart. As amazing as it might be to think about how his flutter had started off without him even being aware of its existence to now feeling its limbs, head, Jisung has finally taken a step back to admire his own progress as a person.

Life isn't about constantly paying back, because if it was, the debt of life itself would kill before anything could've happened.

But it is here as they're finally packing up all their stuff, all the new things they've acquired at this coastal town, to finally fill their boat to sail away that Jisung realises that even though it isn't always necessary to give back, its because you're grateful. Because you admire what that person has done for you.

So, Jisung makes sure the sewing kit Felix had found houses down along with many fabrics are packed into a trunk before they leave.

→

There's something bittersweet about finally leaving the continent.

He's lived his whole life here, all the bad parts, all the hard parts and the new hope-filled parts. But moving on means safety— hopefully. Jisung wants that.

The boat is fully packed after a week of preparing food for at least a month or two thanks to the generator and the fridge and freezer that surprisingly work still.

Jisung stands on the wooden pier, looking back at the home that became theirs for three months, where they grew closer, where growth was made. But Jisung can let it go.

He can let it go for their future. A bright future. A future that will not fail them and leave them imprisoned for the rest of their lives.

The sun is barely peeking over the horizon and a weight of tiredness is seeping in his bones, weighing him down but his vision is clear. The boat is equipped with four mattresses across two rooms below deck and a full functioning kitchen and toilet is all they really have, but it's enough for them.

Hyunjin steps beside him and gently his hands land on his waist, his

fingers digging in to find purchase. Jisung's own hands land on Hyunjin's and he's hoisted upwards to the deck of the boat, Chan at the top to pull him up the rest of the way.

Jisung would've been able to do it himself at least a month ago, but movement has become harder with the passing days. "Here you go," Chan sets him down on the deck and pats his head fondly. Jisung sighs at the touch. "You can go rest more, I think Minhoo's sleeping down there too," Jisung pouts a little bit, but the tiredness won't leave him for the rest of the day if he doesn't sleep more.

"Will you be okay to steer for now?" Jisung questions because he knows Chan had slept restlessly, because he'd woken a few times to Chan whispering to his stomach, patting it when the baby would make a larger move that would wake Jisung. "I'll be fine, so sleep,"

Minho is down below deck, already passed out on the mattress furthest away from the door and Jisung hums gently before deciding to go to the other room where Hyunjin is, much to his surprise because he had literally just hoisted him up to the boat.

"You move quick," Jisung comments but Hyunjin just shrugs and opens up his arms. "It's peaceful down here..." Jisung screws his nose up at him. "Get your mind out of the gutter, young man," Jisung scolds him gently but goes to carefully lower himself onto Hyunjin's lap.

"Here's to new beginnings," Hyunjin whispers as the roar of the engine starts. Jisung hums and yawns quietly. Hyunjin giggles at him and presses a kiss to the corner of Jisung's mouth. "Sleep now," He murmurs. "I'll stay with you,"

Jisung takes the opportunity and eases into sleep quickly.

Hyunjin bites down on his lip, his hands pressing against his thumping heart as if it is going to help it calm down. Jisung is many things, but Hyunjin will always feel a thump in his heart when Jisung looks his way.

→

The boat moves fast.

It's still only been two weeks but Chan believes it will only take two more before they hit land once more.

Jisung's made himself busy, wishing to give back to Minho so he takes out the sewing kit and hangs out with Seungmin and Felix most of the time, working together with Felix's past skill with sewing and Seungmin's eye for detail to make more clothes for the others.

"I want to make Minho a jacket," Jisung states after finishing another sleeveless shirt for anyone who wants it. It's hot out in the middle of the ocean during the summer and the air that hits their skin is more than welcome. It stays relatively cool below deck, with the oceans cool water insulating the floor and the bottom halves of the walls of the boat's interior. But it's absolutely freezing during the night, almost like a desert of water out on the exposed sea.

"A jacket?" Seungmin asks again and Jisung hums. He's currently covered in a thin t-shirt that covers him down to his mid thigh and underwear underneath. There was no point in dressing in much else since all they were doing was trying to pass time and not bore themselves to death.

"With pockets and stuff," Jisung elaborates. "He likes to collect things," Jisung has seen his stash of leaves and 'cool' rocks he's stuffed in his pants pockets before. "Okay then!" Seungmin cheers. "Let's get to it, then!"

→

"Hi," Felix shimmies himself into the seat with Chan and smiles fondly at him. "You remind me of home, a bit," he suddenly says and Chan's ears turn bright red. "You're really adaptive, you know that

right?”

“Perhaps I know a few of my strong points,” Chan laughs bashfully. Felix rests his jaw on his fist and hums. “Tell me about yourself, then. We only really know each other's survival tactics at most,”

Chan laughs at him and quickly finds himself not minding the close proximity they share.

“Hmmm... my favourite colour is black?” Felix scoffs. “Black is a shade!” But he smiles quickly, his eyes pretty and shiny. “I like pink,” he then adds softly. “That suits you,” Chan tells him and the younger beams.

“Everyone is getting so thin...” Felix trails off after at least an hour of talking. His head is now resting on Chan's shoulder as they both stare out at the sea ahead of them.

Chan is glad Felix has noticed it too. Chan has noticed the changes of his own body, too. Before breaking them out, Chan had muscles upon muscles defined across his body, but most of them have faded, lost the mass they used to hold. Except for his legs, he's used them way too much like everyone else. But that's not that worrisome, because Chan knows he can put it back on and build up his muscle again when they finally find safety in this fabled civilisation.

Chan isn't worried about his long time friends, but the youngest four, are gaunt and its becoming worrying.

Jisung had been tiny from the get-go, his waist thin already and his ribs were already visible which was concerning then. And now, with the added pressure of carrying a baby, he's far too thin for it to be healthy. But food is scarce and with this boat trip being uncharted, they can't risk eating too much at once and it hurts Chan to see the young boy so frail from malnutrition.

“I hope Mydar is real,” Felix whispers and Chan hums. “So Sungie can be healthy in the last stretch of his pregnancy and have a safe delivery...”

“We all are hoping that, Lix,”

"I think he's going to be a good dad," Felix continues on. "I'm proud of how far he's come these months,"

"He's a good person," Chan agrees softly. "But he's so..."

"Difficult to get around? Fragile? Sensitive?" Felix laughs but Chan breathes out a deep breath. "No... not really... I think he's formidable... I don't think just anyone could go through what he did and be so strong and resilient about it,"

"Isn't he?" Felix shuffles even closer. "I think he's amazing... but you... do you know how much you carry us all?" Felix finally lifts his head and stares into the deep dark orbs that glimmer gently like the glistening waves lapping gently. Chan gulps and shakes his head, "I'm not, I'm just trying to—"

"You are." He states strongly. There's no room for disagreement in his tone. Chan swallows the rock that's building up in his throat. "You are the reason we got out in the first place, and don't ask how I knew that Jisung blubbers when he's sad— you Chan, you saved us four... can't you accept what I'm trying to say?"

"I," Chan looks down to his feet. "I'm a little insecure, I guess."

"Then let me tell you how amazing you are! I can be like a warm jacket! You can rely on me, you know? You don't have to put up with everything yourself, okay?"

Chan gulps again.

"I don't want to be a bother..."

"Chan," Felix whispers. "I mean this when I say this, I would never offer if I didn't want to. And you're so worth it, it hurts me to see you so unconfident. If you could only see yourself like we do,"

"You guys are enough for me,"

"Chan," Felix says sternly. "Don't hold it all in, that's not healthy,"

“I’ll be fine, Felix. Seriously, don’t worry about me,”

“Okay,” Felix shrugs and he stands up, brushing his hands down the long shirt he’s wearing.

“But you can always find me, don’t keep it in all the time,”

Chan ducks his head. “Okay...”

“Get some sleep soon, Minho said he’d come and take over when dawn hits,”

Chan sighs deeply when Felix finally leaves. His rapid beating heart takes a bit to calm and really, that’s all Chan wishes to tell Felix. About how when he smiles it leaves a flutter in his chest and a blooming warmth around his body.

Chan had once willed himself to not fall, but maybe it’s not such a terrible thing after all because Felix is the warm, golden sunshine and Chan feels like a lone storm cloud. A little sunshine would be welcome.

→

Jisung finishes Minho's jacket within a week.

It’s well made and Jisung hopes he’ll like the black fabric with many built-in pockets that Felix helped him sew in. It keeps the warmth in but is thin enough to not overheat in. Jisung is rather proud of it and when he finally wanders to Minho to give him the jacket, he comes in with a wide smile.

“Minho,” he calls and the man looking at the ocean as he leans against the railing of the boat slowly turns, his eyes slightly wider than usual.

Jisung waddles over and Minho reaches out for his arm. Jisung smiles broadly up at him and Minho chokes on a breath.

"I made you a jacket," he says and Minho blinks dumbly.

"A jacket in the middle of summer?" He speaks the words before he thinks and he wants to slap himself silly when Jisung's smile falls. "Oh... well... I thought it would help you stay warm when you go out at night... like you do sometimes,"

"Oh yeah!" Minho clears his throat and takes the black jacket from the younger boy. "Wow... it looks really well made,"

"Felix helped me," He admits and he smiles again when Minho tugs it on, making a noise of satisfaction. "You look nice in it!" Jisung cheers and gives him two thumbs up. Minho chuckles and tugs on the black fabric. "It's waterproof and even has a hood!" He shows him excitedly and ends up so close his stomach pokes against Minho's own. Minho stiffens when he feels a kick clearly against his own stomach.

"Doesn't that hurt?" Minho finds himself asking while reaching out to grip the round bump tenderly. He feels more movement and he tenses.

"Not all the time. If they're up in my ribs or trying to escape it does,"

"Escape?" Minho's eyes widen and Jisung laughs. "No not like that, they just push down pretty hard sometimes," Minho retracts his hands and flashes Jisung a small smile.

"Thanks for the jacket... but why did you make it?" His voice trails off but Jisung hears it just fine. "You fixed the boat," He reminds him. "It was the least I could do,"

"Ah... it's fine, really I didn't expect anything from anyone after I fixed it,"

"It was a big job. I wanted to show my appreciation somehow," Jisung shrugs his thin shoulders. Minho averts his eyes and hums. "Thanks," he mumbles and Jisung lets out a giggle.

"Hey," Hyunjin pouts when Jisung runs into him in the kitchen.

“Why don’t I get a jacket for all my hard work,” Jisung flicks his nose. “I didn’t see you fix a whole boat, Hyunjin,” he narrows his eyes at him but they soften quickly. “Besides, you get kisses from me what else would you want?”

Hyunjin hums and then grins. “A kiss?”

“Ugh, I can’t believe I let you even touch me,”

“Don’t act like you hate me,” Hyunjin whines and Jisung scoffs but allows him to swoop down and connect their mouths together.

Hyunjin's touch over the three months has been rather constant and it's grown from quick kisses and Hyunjin being ever so prudish and reluctant to him barely allowing Jisung to breathe and his hands wander further and further each time.

Like now, his hands wander to the small of his back and if it weren't for the blockade of his belly, Hyunjin would have it his way and be pressed up against Jisung as much as possible.

“Gosh,” Jisung breathes when he breaks off for a breather. “Don’t squish my baby,”

“I won’t,” Hyunjin promises before reaching down once more. Jisung is addictive Hyunjin had quickly found and now, it's almost impossible to keep his hands to himself, to keep his want at bay, but Hyunjin doesn't want to scare him away or push him into anything because Hyunjin still knows Jisung doesn't feel the same way about him.

Hyunjin thinks it's love he feels, but he's so scared to tell Jisung because this little bit of bliss they get from each other, after being so starved of intimate touch is so good it's almost painful.

Hyunjin has gone from an enemy to tolerated, to whatever this is. Hyunjin doesn't know if they're friends, he assumes so but Hyunjin has assumed things in the past that were completely wrong so he doesn't trust his own judgement much.

Maybe he can keep his feelings to himself but as time goes on and

Jisung soaks in his touch, in his attention Hyunjin thinks he might just have a chance.

But Jisung is mercurial, too divine it hurts him to even hold him so close. Hyunjin wants to fuel those fires, be the nourishment that keeps those fires burning so bright.

Jisung is a struggling ember, a spark that will burn down the world one day and Hyunjin can only watch hopelessly, absolutely enthralled by the flames dancing against the wind.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HII!! first of all skz!! im so proud of them!!!!

again thank you everyone who leaves comments, you guys keep me going honestly. The slow burn in this is so... i love it. writing all their characters so deeply and all their backstories (which will all be told by everyone at some point! some of them are important to the plot!) is so worthwhile to write bc i think it adds depth to them all! in my last fic the main pairing got together by chapter 13 i believe and gosh... i can tell you the main pairing is not getting together soon... hahaha I've planned for this fic to be BIG... I'm so excited to finish it and share it all with you.

i hope all readers from America are safe and i really hope you guys are okay <333 sending love!!

here's my twitter if anyone wants to talk!! my dms are always open!! <333 [my twt!](#)
thank you guys again! you're amazing!! <333

Summary for the Chapter:

tw mentions of drowning

Jisung wakes to a scream and as soon as his eyes peel open, he's flying off the mattress, out of Chan's warm embrace and his back crashes against the wall. A winded moan leaves his lips and a scream then sounds out, ripping harshly through the air.

Minho swings the door open to the room, swaying on his own feet, struggling to stay upright. His eyes are wide in alarm and he looks straight to Chan. "There's a storm!" He cries out loudly.

Changbin leaps up and clambers towards Jisung, helping him from the ground. "Are you okay," He rubs at his back and Jisung manages out a wince. "I'm okay, just got the wind knocked out of me,"

"What do we do?" Changbin wraps an arm around Jisung's waist, trying his best to stabilise him but the boat rocks hazardously and Changbin can barely find his own balance. "Let's all stay together," Chan asserts and with struggle they fall into the other room, finding the other four huddled together.

Seungmin is weeping softly with Felix trying to comfort him while Hyunjin is looking at Jeongin's arm.

"Jeonginnie?" Jisung whimpers. The youngest looks up at him, his eyes blurred with tears and his lips pouty. "I feel on my arm," He whines out with a snuffle.

“I think it’s broken,” Hyunjin then declares and Seungmin bursts out into sobs as Jisung lets out a high pitched cry. “Not Innie,”

“I’ll be okay!” Jeongin tries assuring them. “I promise,”

The boat rocks dangerously again and Jisung plops himself down on a mattress before anything worse can happen.

The storm doesn’t settle for hours, but it continues to rage. Lightning and thunder strike loudly Jisung can feel his flutter jump at the particularly loud claps of thunder.

No one falls back asleep. The rocking of the boat turns into a vicious shaking that never ceases to stop. The wind howls and water laps higher and higher, splashing on the deck and water slowly begins to seep in through the roof.

“Umm I don’t think that’s very good,” Hyunjin whispers, pointing at the water dripping down. Minho nods his head.

“I think,” Chan speaks up. He licks his lips and turns to look at all of them. “That I should go up and see what’s going on,”

“No!” Felix instantly screams. Seungmin is quick to yell out next.

Jisung stares at him.

“What good is that going to do?” Changbin speaks up. Chan purses his lips. “Maybe we’re close? Maybe there’s something out there now?”

“Chan...” Hyunjin voice cracks.

“I’ll go with you, then!”

“Sit the fuck down, Jisung!” Minho tugs on his wrist roughly and pulls him closer, his hands pressing him closer to his side. Jisung frowns.

“I’m not going to risk you, Ji,” Chan shakes his head at him. “Stay here and give me the peace of mind that the both of you will be okay,”

“But what if you get thrown off overboard or some crazy shit? It could happen, Chan!”

“Look, it’s nice to see you so concerned about me but I promise you I’m going to come straight back down,”

Jisung pauses for a bit.

“If you don’t I’m following you into that damn ocean,”

“And do what?” Minho deadpans. “Hope that your bump will be buoyant?”

“I don’t even know what that means!” Jisung cries out. Hyunjin clears his throat. “I’ll go with him instead, Jisung,” Chan goes to open his mouth again, probably to refuse but Hyunjin glares at him.

“Fine.”

“We’ll be right back, okay? No one worry too much,”

When they disappear out of the room, Jisung flinches at the thunder and the door slamming at once. The baby jumps too, jarring a limb up into his ribcage.

No one says anything, but Jisung can hear the ragged breathing, the harsh intakes when particularly loud splashes are heard. A scream, they freeze all together. No one dares to move until the thumping of feet down the stairs is heard— two pairs. Jisung lets out a sigh of relief.

The door slams open and Hyunjin's bursts in, Chan right behind him.

His eyes are light, face stretched in a smile and he breathes in heavy before exclaiming. “We can see the land!”

Noise erupts around the cabin.

But Jisung's ears ring.

Land.

Safety .

Revolt .

But the cheering swiftly stops when a deafening crack fills their ears. Jisung desperately clutches at his ringing ears.

“A leak!” Minho then screams out and the brief moment of relief, excitement and triumph dissipates into nothing.

Water rushes through the floor rapidly wetting the floor.

Jisung's heart thumps and his hands shake. He stands on surprisingly steady legs and with Seungmin and Changbin he runs to the deck, up the stairs, one hand pressed under his heavy middle. He doesn't exactly know what had filled him in that moment, but Jisung had been prepared to swim to the shore that peaks in the horizon if it meant their survival.

But there's a lifeboat, a flimsy old plastic thing that no one's sure is going to even float them, but it's the only thing that could heighten

the chance of survival.

“The bags! Get the bags! The first aid kit!” Someone yells over the wind and rain that’s already drenched them. Jisung stays on deck, trying his best to get the lifeboat full of air with Changbin and Seungmin.

Jeongin comes up on deck and joins them in blowing up the boat, his left arm tied in a makeshift sling from one of the sleeve-less shirts Seungmin had sewn.

Jisung can hear scurrying below deck and grunts and when Hyunjin, Minho, Felix and Chan come up to the deck, bags on backs, clutching their only belongings, they throw the lifeboat down into the raging waters— a move that could sabotage them, but there is no other way.

“We have to jump!” Seungmin yells over the pelting rain and angry thunder strikes. “It’s so far!” Jisung cries out.

“We can do it! You can do it!” Minho is the first one to jump over the edge, surprisingly enough because Jisung knows for a fact he doesn’t know how to swim, but bravery runs through that man’s veins. He lands it, and the plastic boat holds his weight and the two bags easily.

“Come on!” He screams. His hair sticks to his forehead, sharp ends poking at his eyes that are wide in alarm. His brows are narrowed and he’s focused on Seungmin who throws his leg over the railing. He catches him easily, only the boy’s foot catching on the edge of the

boat.

“Chan,” Jisung breathes out when Jeongin leaps off careful of his arm.

“Sung, it’s okay you can do it,”

“No,” He’s crying and he’s only aware of it because of the stark difference in temperature over his cheeks. “I can’t do it,”

“Yes, you can!” Chan has to yell over the howling wind. Felix has made it on with Changbin. The boat seems to be holding up well with the five males and it stays afloat when Hyunjin barrels down, clutching onto the first aid kit desperately.

“Come on!” They scream up at them but Jisung's knees are wobbly. The boat is sinking down, making the drop lower and lower.

“I’ll wait until its low!” Jisung cries over the roaring elements. “Jisung, come with me then! It might be dangerous!” Chan proposes but Jisung shakes his head.

“No!” He screams this time, not because he needs to shout over the blistering wind and icy rain, but because he’s genuinely growing more and more upset with him now.

“Everyone was landing on their tummies when they jumped!” He then bursts out just as Chan opens his mouth again. Chan's lips part and his eyes shine in realisation.

“Jump into the water!” He tells him as he nears the railing. “I’ll get you on that boat no matter what, okay?”

Jisung trusts Chan. He trusts his firm hands that hold him as he falls under the daze of sleep. He trusts him because its Chan, the man who had seen him as a child, who had always remembered him.

Chan jumps off, lands on the boat, on his stomach like everyone else and Chan understand why Jisung is so adamant to not follow everyone else actions. The action leaves him winded, too and if Chan was in his position, he knows he’d not want to risk it.

“Come on, Sungie!” Felix shrieks. “You can do it!”

And he does.

He leaps off the ledge and plunges into icy, salty water. Panic fills him when he thinks about what could be lurking underneath, but before he can go into a rush of panic, a hand grabs his shoulder and pulls his head above the angry, unforgiving waves. They slap at his face, saltwater filling his airways and he tries to splutter, but it only makes in inhale more water.

When Chan and Minhø pull him up on the boat, Jisung is choking on air, unable to breathe or get the water out of his lungs.

“Keep coughing!” Hyunjin urges him. A warm hand plasters to his back, Chan's broad palm and it hits him hard. He buckles, his body lurching forwards and water then dribbles down his chin from his parted lips.

He coughs after he gets the water out, his throat and nose irritated from all the salt.

Their boat sinks before their eyes. Minho makes a strangled noise and flings his head back, roaring at the skies. His balled up fist bangs at the water over the lifeboats rim and it splashes back into his eyes.

Jisung's mouth is dry, even though he had almost drowned for the second time in his life.

“Oh fuck,” Hyunjin whispers out. His hands fall limp in his lap and he heaves out a breath.

“Is everyone okay?” Jeongin murmurs. “I think so,” Changbin answers rather breathlessly.

“But fuck that made me age like five years I think,” He continues on and Felix snorts. “It’s a bit squishy with all eight of us,”

“Nine,” Minho grunts. “I’m sorry,” Jisung whispers. They’re all jammed in and the only way they fit is squished up together. Jisung's bump is pressed uncomfortably pressed Minho's own abdomen and the baby is going absolutely insane.

“Why would you apologise for that?” Minho frowns at him and tugs on his jacket— the one Jisung made for him just last week. “You can’t help it,” he raises his eyebrows. “It’s fine anyway, at least they’re letting us know they’re okay,”

Jisung blames it on the absolute raging mess of hormones through his body that makes him burst out into ugly sobbing once more.

“Oh Sungie,” Felix reaches out and clutches his hands. “It’s okay,”

“I know!” He wails out. “I think that’s why I’m crying!”

“Not to alarm anyone but I think we’re meant to paddle to the shore! We’re going to get dragged out at this rate,” Seungmin voice rings out. “Oh always the level headed one, Seungmin,” Changbin pats his thigh. Seungmin shrugs. “I’ll take that as a compliment?”

“It was!” Changbin calls out before he shoves his hands into the water with the others, trying their best to paddle through rough waters.

They rock back and forth on waves, pushing and pulling and it’s only when one massive swell of a wave speeds the inflatable boat towards the land.

Dawn breaks, but no one can tell because the sky is dark and stormy. They can only guess how much time has passed since they escaped the capsizing boat.

It becomes clear that trying so hard to paddle to the shore in a storm is not a very good idea, so they wait.

Big waves take them further to the land, but not close enough to get out and swim. It's still too far, too deep and they're not ready to take such a risk.

The storm clears slowly and the last big wave that drags them closer is enough for them to start paddling again and once the shore is only a few hundred meters away, Chan jumps out. Felix and Seungmin scream and Jisung tries to reach out for him, but he finds movement almost impossible. His body has seized up from the uncomfortable position.

But Chan can stand and he smiles at them just as a wave douses him in saltwater. He blinks it away, not swallowing a whole breath full like Jisung did.

"You are so reckless!" Jisung yells at him and if he were in reach, he'd hit him.

"I once read in school the oceans tend to be shallow close to the shore. Shallower than you might think,"

"What if it wasn't?" Jisung hisses back. Chan shrugs as Hyunjin jumps out. "I would've swum back and got back in,"

"You're so optimistic..." Minho mutters under his breath. Felix slaps

him and frowns at him. “At least he’s not a pessimist like you and Sungie!”

Minho just shakes his head and pushes himself out, pushing at the back right corner of the boat. “Oh wow, you really can stand up here,”

Changbin then jumps out with Seungmin and Felix goes to Hyunjin, helping him pull the front along.

“Umm I would love to get out and help you guys but I don’t think I can move right now,” Jisung admits bashfully. Jeongin just gestures to his arm in the sling.

“It’s okay we’ll be there at the shore soon,” Chan tells him. “It’s no trouble,”

When the front of the boat catches on the wet sand, Jisung is close to tears again. The others are cheering over the storm that’s slowly dying. Jeongin is howling in celebrations next to him, but Jisung currently struggling to even move out of the boat.

“Gosh, I know you might think I’m being dramatic but can someone please pick me up I *cannot move*,” he hisses out through clenched teeth. Chan reaches in with no complaints and bundles him in his arms with hardly any issues. “I’ll put you on the grass, okay?” Jisung just hums, glad to be finally off the water.

The sand stretches for at least twenty meters, but Chan gets across it quickly and gently places him down on the harder ground.

“We’ll get the rest of the stuff and come right back, okay?”

“Thank you,” Jisung breathes out.

The rain patters down softly on the ground around him.

“I feel dizzy,” is the first thing Seungmin says before collapsing right before Jisung. “Minnie!”

“I’m fine!” He shouts back. “Just being off the boat and all... the world feels like it’s swaying,”

“It kind of feels like after getting off the spinning tractor when we were kids,” Changbin mutter and Minho starts cackling almost instantly. “I remember the first time you got on it!” He clutches his stomach.

“Dad wasn’t happy when you puked all over the green onions,” Changbin shrugs. “Shouldn’t have fed me so much first!”

“Whatever, whatever,” Chan shakes his head at them. “Should we go on for a bit or stay to rest?”

“I think if we go a bit further inland we’ll find old houses again,” Changbin says and they hum in agreement.

“I think I fucked my hips up,” Jisung then states matter-of-factly. Changbin raises a brow at him.

Hyunjin kneels down next to him and takes his hips with both hands and does some god-awful movement with them that makes Jisung scream and slap his head.

“You could’ve warned me!” He cries out but then expresses his surprise with a little ‘hmm’. “Your bones and joints move during... this particular stage,”

Minho shivers and Jisung pales slightly. “Hey... it’s okay I promise we’ll be in Mydar by the time you... you know,” Hyunjin pats his middle and then stands, reaching his hands out for Jisung to take. Jisung allows the help.

“You have ten weeks to go. We’ll be safe before then,” Jisung breathes in deeply. “I hope so, I don’t know what we’d do if we don’t find it though...”

“We will,” Chan says strongly.

There’s no room for argument in his tone. It’s strong, unmoving and it fills Jisung with hope.

Hope that they find this haven quickly.

→

The first house they find that hasn't collapsed on itself is a shack that's barely big enough to fit them all, but they take it gladly. It's got a few leaks in the roof but they're definitely desensitised from earlier events.

"How do you feel after the walk?" Hyunjin asks Jisung who groans out loudly. "Like shit!" He responds loudly. Hyunjin hums and lays next to him. They had dried off a little bit, but Jisung is too tired to switch his clothes.

"You might catch a cold," Hyunjin warns. "I'm tired,"

"Jisung," Chan cuts in sternly. "No one is to get sick. We need to get to Mydar so Sung can settle in before... before the baby,"

"Fine. But can I go to sleep right after?"

"No food?" Chan cocks his head at him Jisung shakes his head. "I want to sleep."

"Okay, but you have to eat in the morning," he asserts. Jisung hums and catches the clothes Felix throws him.

He comes out minutes later in a large dry long-sleeve shirt with a

pout across his lips. "The pants don't fit!" He cries before stomping over and burying his face in Hyunjin's side. Hyunjin just laughs and Jisung can hear Minho's cackling laughter. Chan spoons him from behind and tugs his shirt back down over his butt.

"You're going to suffocate me,"

"I'm trying to prevent you from getting sick," Chan tells him. "Now sleep,"

Chan falls asleep before Jisung, which is unheard of, but after the day they've had, Jisung doesn't blame him. However, Hyunjin takes that as a chance to indulge himself in another kissing session.

Jisung falls asleep with plush lips gently brushing against his cold cheeks and when Hyunjin whispers words he means with his heart under the intoxication of Jisung's touch, his aura and of thick sleep, Jisung wishes it was only his imagination.

But it's too vivid to be a dream and Jisung sinks lower into himself, into guilt that he had pushed away in turn for pleasure.

Jisung regrets only a few things in his life, but he wishes now that he had never indulged himself in Hyunjin's physical affection because it was unlined with feelings. Love that Jisung can't give back.

And suddenly something shatters in him.

→

Jisung avoids Hyunjin at all costs.

Hyunjin notices it first, of course, but Chan then catches on, then Minho, Felix and then the rest of them. And then it's too late to pretend nothing has been going on between them.

Two days.

It doesn't sound like much, especially after Jisung hating his guts for pretty much half their journey, but these past few months have been different. Jisung had allowed something to happen and Hyunjin was foolish enough to take that step, not caring about consequences.

Hyunjin had become used to the physical affection he was now allowed to shower Jisung in, to touch his skin, brush his lips over his.

Jisung doesn't even look over at him. Instead, he waddles along with anyone else except him. He even falls into step with Minho a few times, talking about something that causes Minho to crack a small smile sometimes.

"What happened between you two, now?" Felix's arms are crossed over his chest, his eyebrows furrowed. It's honestly intimidating.

“I don’t know,” Hyunjin sighs loudly and Felix purses his lips.

“Liar,” Felix accuses him boldly and Hyunjin sighs dramatically.

“Look,” Hyunjin begins. He swallows hard. He doesn’t know how, but over the months they’ve spent doing... whatever this is, no one had caught them and honestly, Hyunjin is exactly ecstatic about them finding out, either.

“Our relationship is a little difficult,”

“No shit,” Felix deadpans as they fall into step with each other.

“I think... I’m in love with him,” Felix’s jaw drops and he stops in his tracks. “What,” he whispers out and frowns. “How can you fall in love with someone who basically hates your guts?” Felix hisses at him and Hyunjin’s mouth goes dry.

“He doesn’t hate me...” Hyunjin whispers.

“Jinnie,” Felix sighs out. He reaches for his hand and clutches it firmly with his smaller hands. “At least try to sort it out with him,” Felix mutters. “We can’t risk anything right now.”

“I know,” Hyunjin wets his lips and breathes out heavy. “I’ll talk to him, then,” Felix gives him a weak smile.

After their camp for the night is set up, Hyunjin seeks Jisung out.

He tenses when Hyunjin wanders over and it causes a clench to Hyunjin's heart. He knew he had crossed the fine line they had but stupidly he had hoped Jisung wouldn't care, or suddenly confess his own feelings.

He tries to emerge into a conversation with Felix but the other just shakes his head and jerks his head to Hyunjin.

"Talk to each other," He mutters before leaving.

"I think it'd be better if we get some space from everyone else," Jisung sighs as he heaves himself to his feet.

The woods are cooler here than the coastline of either continent. The air smells different from the forests on the other continent. It smells sweet like nectar is dripping down trees, getting caught in the breeze. Jisung rather the smell Chan naturally carries, the petrichor scent that calms him down almost instantly after catching a single whiff.

"Why are you avoiding me again?" Hyunjin starts. Jisung's bottom lip catches in his teeth.

"You know, don't you?" He asks him and Hyunjin looks down,

humming. "I have a guess,"

"I don't think you're stupid enough to need me to tell you, right?"

"I meant it," Hyunjin rushes out. "I can't take it back, I can't hide it or forget it happened, Jisung."

"What if that's the easier way out?" Jisung narrows his eyes at him the tiniest bit. "What if we can forget it happened and go back to normal— no kissing but how friends act?"

"I love you Jisung, fuck, don't you get that? I can't just... not after tasting what it's like to have you, to hold you, that's not fair..."

"Life isn't fair, Hyunjin," Jisung spits out and Hyunjin then realises that's one thing he should never say to Jisung.

Jisung's life hasn't been fair not one little bit. He has suffered through everything he didn't want, didn't say yes to.

Maybe Hyunjin is in love with him, and maybe it doesn't feel fair that Jisung wants him to forget, bury his feelings but Jisung still lives through the unfairness of his life. It makes Hyunjin feel like a selfish bastard saying that in front of Jisung.

It probably is best, burying his feelings in turn for a comfortable trip, it is probably worth the pain but Hyunjin won't forget it until Jisung knows until he really knows how he feels.

“Fuck, I’m sorry... I just, you know. I know that you know, because your smart but god, Jisung when I say I love I don’t think you understand the depth of that,”

“I heard you days ago,” he replies gently. Jisung's mouth is dry, his throat aching with his next words. “But I chose to ignore it so I wouldn’t have to do this,”

Hyunjin has fucked up.

He should’ve thought more rationally because Jisung isn’t the type of person to be lured by stupid kisses. He’s more than that, complicated but Hyunjin can’t blame him for that.

“But why,” Hyunjin croaks out. “Why does it all have to be so difficult, Jisung?”

Jisung takes in a deep shaky breath.

“Because... you remind me of the things I try to cut out of my mind every day. When I wake up every morning, I’m ready to greet white walls and cold sheets and when I open my eyes and see this all, the nature and everything, I feel like a human again. Someone that has a choice but when I see you,” Jisung cries and Hyunjin reaches out, catching his shoulders.

“Sometimes I see your face and it flashes before my eyes. Needles, pain. Blood. Loss. And I can’t shake it off Hyunjin, not now and I can’t let you love me when I feel so... so negatively about this all still. I don’t hate you anymore. I don’t think it’s bad that you love me, but the moment those memories come back, I just can’t even bear myself to look at you,”

And now that Jisung tells him that, it suddenly all fits into place. The times Jisung had barely spoken a word to him, had busied himself and had fallen asleep before Hyunjin could even reach out for him. He had brushed it off then as Jisung needing space, Hyunjin knows he does need that sometimes, but this... Hyunjin's stomach churns.

He hates himself for making Jisung feel this way. Jisung could never be so right. Life isn’t fair.

The truth hurts and it stings on its way out, ripping Jisung’s tongue to shreds, but none of that compares to the utter look of destruction on Hyunjin's face.

Hyunjin loves him. A pure love, a protective love, a warm love that Jisung wishes he could accept.

Jisung would like to give it back, but he’s too familiar sometimes and Jisung can’t drown himself anymore. He must reach the surface and breach the barriers that are slowly tugging at his frayed edges, pulling him apart.

But Jisung has pulled Hyunjin apart at the seams and as much as Jisung wishes he could soothe him back to his strong self, Jisung can't. He wants to caress him, tell him he’s loved too, but in his heart,

Hyunjin is like a needle piercing through his vital organ. He's there, in his heart but his presence hurts Jisung and he can't let it grow into a festering wound.

Not right now at least.

"Maybe in five years I'll be able to look at you and nothing will haunt me," he says. "But I can't let you waste your life away, waiting for me. I will never forget the scars they've left on me. Physically and mentally, but one day I will let you in. And maybe it won't be full of love like lovers feel, maybe it will be friendship." Jisung breathes in deep. "And I hope I do because friendship is the most beautiful thing I've felt so far and if there's any part of me I can give you, it would be the trust of a great friend, because you deserve that. More than that. But right now, I have nothing to give because I am nothing,"

"You are everything," Hyunjin whispers out. Jisung shakes his head.

"You trust me, you do," Tears begin to run down Hyunjin's face and Jisung has to take a step back. Hyunjin cups his cheeks and presses their foreheads together.

"I do," Jisung murmurs. "But we just can't do this..."

Hyunjin's sob is so loud it cracks through Jisung's ears like lightning.

"I can't stop loving you, please... why can't we just go on?"

“Because,” Jisung chokes on his own saliva. “I’m not going to let you waste any more of your time giving you false ideas... that’s not fair on you,” His voice cracks.

“Fuck, you’re so complicated,” Hyunjin sobs and Jisung whimpers out. “I know,” he whispers. His fingers gently tug at the material of Hyunjin's shirt.

“We’re not saying goodbye, Hyunjin... we’re just going down the better path because we can’t go down the paths we wish,”

Hyunjin cries even louder. His tears wet the neckline of Jisung's shirt, but he doesn’t care. His heart hurt for Hyunjin. His friend.

“What path do you wish of?” Hyunjin asks him through his mess of tears. Jisung strokes his face gently. Hyunjin's thumb brushes over the plump flesh of his bottom lip.

“I cannot tell you that,” Jisung murmurs lowly.

A path of destruction. A path that will burn and tear humanity to the ground, because it has failed him, failed his friends. Jisung will not let it destroy him any further. He will never let greedy fingers touch the life he carries. Jisung has promised himself he will dismantle the place that caused his life to fall into ruin.

But not yet.

Jisung doesn’t dare to speak of his wishes, his plans. He will do it. He

will erupt into golden flames if he must, but he will march in, flames licking at his fingertips and they will wish for mercy that he will not give.

Hyunjin weeps and with shaky hands he tugs on Jisung's waist, pressing their middles together. Jisung lets him close his eyes and lean in one last time because its the least he can do after breaking his heart.

Wet lips plaster over his own and through a choked cry as Hyunjin kisses him one last time, the taste of salty tears leaks onto his tongue.

Jisung can't hold back his own sob and he clutches onto his shoulders. The living proof of how unfair his life has been wiggles inside of him, Hyunjin feels it and sobs louder, breaking apart to try to suck in useless air.

He tries to smile at Hyunjin, tries so hard to end this on a good note because it did give them both comfort at some regard, but it comes out as a pained wince. Their hands fall from each other's bodies and when Jisung finally takes that step to leave, he hears the crunch of Hyunjin's knees hitting the leaves covering the ground and a choked back cry.

Jisung doesn't turn back.

Jisung's path will be full of desolation in the future, but he will not be on the end of the fire. He will be the welder. The cause of destruction to take down everything that has hurt him and his

friends.

He swears it.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HI SO @ that one person in the bookmarks who said they no idea where the thought came from for this fic, i honestly have no clue either SO!!!

THEYVE MADE BUT AT WHAT COSTTTT god... i know quite a few of you guys were rooting for hyunsung and u guys might be very disappointed to come to this point, but its not over, their relationship does continue to expand etc AND even if it mightn't turn out as endgame hyunsung, the result of their relationship is worth it i think! plus once Minho gets his gears grinding u might be surprised of what is going to happen!! i hope you guys stick around!!

this is pretty much the first arc over!! part two of this fic pretty starts next chapter which I'm excited for!! more plot!! i cannot thank you guys enough like... what... you guys are making me think I'm actually okay at writing LMAOO thank you guys so much i love you!!!

also if you guys actually do enjoy my writing I'm posting something else very shortly AHHH

<333333

18. 17→

Notes for the Chapter:

TW blood at the end of the chapter!

(also talks of birthing but it's in the tags but just in case!)

There's a rift again.

Jisung had tried to avoid that but after his conversation with Hyunjin, it hurt him too much to even look at him. It had taken hours for Hyunjin to come back, but Jisung had waited up, feigning sleep while Chan held him as he slept peacefully just to make sure he came back in one piece.

Hyunjin didn't seek him out either and hasn't since as much looked his way.

Jisung would've been okay with that in other circumstances. However, Hyunjin is the only medic out here and he's the only one that knows how to fix the illnesses or wounds they've collected over their journey.

He tends to Jeongin's arm almost daily for the rest of the week, making sure the bandage he put on the first night they arrived on the continent was tight enough and keeping his arm in place.

And Jisung is stubborn. Too stubborn perhaps.

It starts off as nightmares that leave him panting. Chan wakes every time he does and holds him close, rubbing his back and the other rubbing over the areas the baby harshly kicks at. Jisung is grateful he's there for those bits but thence develops headaches.

Ones that feel like his head is spilling in two when a louder than average sound fills his ears. Jisung would've got to Hyunjin, asked for medicine, for him to check up on his baby but there's an unspoken agreement between them to not talk to each other, to barely acknowledge each others presence and he wasn't that desperate.

But he is, it's just the fear that curdles in his stomach when he tries to muster his courage to face Hyunjin is overwhelming so he tries to suck it up.

That is until three days of headaches nausea kicks in at full force and there was no way he could hide it now.

Changbin is the one who catches him on his way down, but Jisung pulls him down with him and throws up everything he'd forced down that morning.

And that had caught Hyunjin's attention.

Hyunjin gives him an anti-nausea tablet but Jisung refuses to take it after Hyunjin admits he's not sure if its safe for the baby.

He's not willing to risk anything. Not after getting this far. Jisung can't even bear the damned thought of anything happening now. It had destroyed him enough last time and he'd let anything similar happen.

Hyunjin doesn't force him but tells him if he changes his mind he won't be far away.

Chan lends him his aid to walk and Jisung allows him to hold him around his waist, helping him stay upright.

"Not too much longer, we should reach Mydar soon,"

"If it exists," Jisung pants but Chan's fingers pat against his side. "It has to,"

→

"I remember when we said this journey would take a few months at most," Jisung comments that night around the fire.

Jeongin snorts and plonks himself down on the fallen log with Jisung. Felix and Seungmin follow them quickly. Felix jams himself in-between Jeongin and Jisung, helping the smallest keep himself upright.

“We were hopeful,” Seungmin murmurs and Jeongin hums in agreement. “I don’t think any of us really understood the weight of this journey and how tiring it would be,”

“If we didn’t need to fix up the boat that much it would’ve taken a lot less,” Felix sighs but he shrugs. “But what can we do? We’re here now and we escaped the government!”

“So far,” Jisung responds bluntly. Felix pouts and elbows him softly in his ribs.

“You’re still... hesitant?” Jeongin peers over at him expectantly. Jisung purses his lips. “I just think safety isn’t guaranteed until we’re protected by something... somewhere,”

Seungmin hums in agreement. “Chan thinks it won’t take much longer to get to Mydar...”

“How crazy is it that we’re heading for a place we’re not even sure exists? Without a backup plan, too?”

“I do trust Chan’s judgement but it is a little impulsive,” Seungmin sighs out and he shrugs. “But I hope we get there soon. I’m exhausted... gosh, I can’t even imagine how tired you are, Sung,”

Jisung chuckles. “I can’t believe I’m still going, honestly,”

It falls quiet for some time as Minho wanders over and makes a fire

in front of them. He doesn't say much to them and keeps his attention on the flames roaring to life.

"It's warmer on this continent but it still gets cold at nights without shelter," Minho speaks before sauntering away to Changbin who's trying his best to organise blankets and clothes back into a singular backpack.

Jisung hisses suddenly, a hand clutching at the underside of his stomach. It alerts everyone's attention nearby. Chan drops the metal pot they've used daily that he was trying to hang over the flames. Felix grabs his hand and squeezes it tightly.

"Hey Hyunjin," Chan calls out quickly when the wince doesn't leave Jisung's face for a few seconds.

"No, no, it's okay," he grits out but the doctor still comes forward and kneels down in front of him.

"How long has this been happening?" He asks gently and Jisung sucks in a deep breath. "Only for three days... but they're not that painful just a cramp, really. I would tell you if I thought something was happening," Hyunjin just purses his lips and then turns to Chan.

"We've got to get to Mydar as quickly as we possibly can,"

Fear spikes in Jisung and he scurries to look at the young doctor.

“Not because somethings wrong. It’s normal but it just means your body is getting ready,”

Jisung pales a considerable amount. Felix squeezes his hand again.

“I know we’ve been avoiding this conversation,” Hyunjin mutters and he looks at the other three on the log. “But I think it’s about time you discuss the birth,”

He makes a small grunting noise. “I know,” Hyunjin slowly rises. “If you don’t want me to discuss with you I’ll leave, but I can explain things to you the boys mightn’t know,”

“You guys know stuff?” Jisung turns to his friends and they all nod.

“I... I do recall some nurses explaining the process but I’ve pretty much blocked it out...” Jisung explains and Jeongin clutches at his hand and sends him a warm smile.

“Well,” Felix clears his throat. “We attended... uh lessons together at least four times so if you want to be enlightened?”

“Please,” Jisung swallows and nods. It’s scary enough to know he has to actually birth the baby but going into with pretty much no knowledge of what’s supposed to happen terrifies him even further. Hyunjin chooses the ground over sitting on the log. He brings his knees to his chest and relaxes by the warmth of the fire.

“Well... we should be in Mydar by the time you’re due, so that should take some stress off...”

They sit and talk over bowls of watery stew— something that reminds Jisung of his childhood in the slums. He learns that it's very similar to a typical birth, dilation and contraction wise but Jisung almost cries when he realises that because of how their artificial-wombs are placed, it takes double the amount of effort to finally birth a baby.

“Then... do you want to discuss who you want there with you? Unless you don’t want any of us...” Hyunjin trails off but Jisung shakes his head quickly.

“I can’t to it alone,” he mutters. Seungmin reaches for his other hand and gives it a reassuring squeeze.

“Will you three stay?” Jisung whispers and he lifts his head, looking at each of them. They all give soft smiles and nod at his question. “Of course. You’ll have us as support, okay?” Felix tells him and Jeongin breathes out heavy when he notices how Jisung relaxes.

“And what if it goes wrong?” He then utters out. Fear swims clearly in his eyes and Hyunjin wants to hug him. One of the first times he’s seen so much emotion across his face and it had to be fear.

"Do you remember when I said I was always going to be by your side? When I said that I won't let anything happen to you?" Jisung bows his head down and hums softly. "I do remember that,"

Hyunjin doesn't reach out to grasp his hand, nor does he shuffles closer to him as he would've mere days ago. He stays still, his eyes shining in the soft orange hues of the fire next to him. "Im not going to change my word on that. Never. I don't care what happens to us," Jisung shuffles. It's getting a bit personal, especially with their friends surrounding them, but Jisung won't tell him to stop because it reassures him too.

"So don't worry too much about it... I'm not going anywhere,"

It is comforting and when they settle for the night, Jisung sleeps soundly through the nausea that swirls deep within his stomach, something lifted off his chest that was choking him without even realising.

Hyunjin is valuable to their group. Not just because he's the only one that knows how to properly treat injuries and diagnose illness, but he won't let his personal feelings in the way. It hurts Jisung far too much for him to even admit it but making Hyunjin cry like he did, breaking his heart sends regret through his body.

When they would kiss Jisung was filled with the wonders of intimate touch, the tingles. The warmth and the hands that caressed him so gently belonged to him. The gentle way he would hold his middle as it grew. Hyunjin wasn't just interested in him, he grew to love him and something, somewhere in Jisung he had clutched that deeply, begging for him to keep it there.

But he wouldn't because as much as he had tried, he could seem to hold Hyunjin the same way. He couldn't breathe life into him the way Hyunjin did to him and his heart had only just begun to thaw and it was painful enough to let himself grow to feel positive about his own

child.

He knows he loves his friends because he wouldn't feel so worked up over the small arguments, the inconveniences, the injuries that occurred to him if he didn't care.

Jisung has gone far too long without love, and now to have these seven others-- soon to be eight-- people that he loves in his own unique way is enough so far. He worries about the state of his heart, how much damage has been done over the years of abuse and the many years of freezing it in stone.

Jisung isn't ready for that type of commitment.

But the thought eats away at him and it quickly turns on him. The commitment of a baby. Raising a kid when you're not done growing up yourself.

Jisung's nineteen.

The what-ifs plague his mind from dusk to dawn.

What if he can't bond with the baby? What if he's disgusted by them even after the birth and what if he fails to be a good parent. What if the kid comes out hating the world and its parent just like he does?

The morning is spent with him stuck in his mind, walking by Changbin and Seungmin. But he doesn't partake in conversation that makes them smile ever so often, because the plaguing thoughts he's tried to ignore for almost seven months are eating at him alive.

It increases nausea that threatens to spill over at any second, but he tries his best to force it down.

Jisung remembers things from his childhood, of his little sister being born and how his parents cared for her and he tries to tell himself he's not jumping into the deep end without knowing nothing, but truly Jisung has blocked out too much of his childhood for that to be sufficient knowledge.

He'd cry if it wasn't for his exhausted state already and when he collapses, crashing to the ground later that afternoon, his whole disposition begins to crumble.

→

Minho has overseen most things that happen during the journeys they've taken part in.

From the fights at campfires to watching Jisung wander off into the forest, obviously not knowing which way to go. He's seen most things happen, just like Chan who makes sure he watches everyone else carefully.

So it's a surprise to him when Jisung goes down for the second time since they've hit this land.

But this time, Changbin isn't close enough and he's possibly not fast enough to zoom over and catch him before he falls, crashing to the

ground.

He skids across the earth, the knees of his pants tear, grazing the skin underneath them. The rush around them is loud and the screams that rip out from their friend's mouths are loud, panicked.

Minho reaches him first and pulls him from the ground, rolling him to his side.

"Fuck!" He hears Hyunjin hiss out before he's on his knees too.

"He landed on his stomach, didn't he?" Felix cries out. He's on the ground too, probably out of fear and not able to keep the strength of his legs. Hyunjin looks to Chan, then to Minho for confirmation.

Minho was the only one to see it all. He had been watching him for quite some time, wondering if he could pick up his pace to walk by him. Jisung had only seemed in deep thought, he didn't show signs of struggle to keep consciousness but Minho had still watched. Looking at the way he picked at the skin around his nails anxiously. Minho wanted to grasp his hand and squeeze it, to at least try to help him out of his anxious thoughts.

The moment his ankle had buckled and the sudden slam of his body to the ground was instantaneous.

Minho swallows thickly and nods. "He didn't fall slowly, either. It was a pretty hard fall,"

"God damn it," Hyunjin hisses out. He scrambles through his medical kit with surprisingly steady hands.

Minho's own hands are shaking on the top of his thighs. Chan reaches out and clutches on hand and squeezes it.

"Chan." Minho breathes out loudly. The eldest looks over at him as his thumb runs over his knuckles.

"I know you might be hesitant, but I— we need you to tell us if that really is Mydar?" Are we heading in the right direction?" He's hit his end of this god awful journey. He can't go on further knowing one of their own is sick, hurt and it causes more panic to rip through him because it's Jisung. Minho wants them to be safe more than anything. All of them, but now it's vital and Minho can't go along with these what if's. He knows Chan's story, why he's hesitant to believe that this place exists, but he can't stand it anymore.

Chan bites on his bottom lip and as Jisung stirs on the ground, a harsh pant leaving his mouth, he nods.

"If we run, we might make it in a few hours,"

Minho shifts and Hyunjin pulls away from Jisung to look at the both of them. Jeongin is huddled in Seungmin's embrace, Changbin standing beside them still. Felix is by Jisung's head, brushing his hair out of his eyes and patting his cheeks gently.

"Then get yourselves into gear," Minho growls underneath his breath

and shuffles over to Jisung. He slides an arm under his knees and the other under his shoulders and pulls him to his chest. Jisung lets out a small groan but doesn't open his eyes.

"Is he okay?" Chan murmurs to Hyunjin.

He looks lost and he's gripping onto the hem of his shirt as if it's the only thing grounding him at the moment. It probably is.

"I... I don't know,"

"What do you mean you don't know?" Minhø hisses and Changbin slaps him across his bicep quickly. He frowns at him and flinches at him when Minhø huffs out.

"I can't tell because I don't have all the medical gear to see!" Hyunjin explains but Seungmin shouts over the top of them, "Stop arguing and start walking! The quicker we get there the sooner we can check Sung out, so come on!"

Changbin clasps tightly at Seungmin's clammy hand and nods in agreement.

→

Light seeps in at the corners of his eyelids, red and bright. Jisung groans as soon as he comes to. His head bangs against a chest in a steady rhythm and when he listens carefully, he can hear shuddering breath and footsteps all around him.

Jisung finally opens his eyes and he's met with Minho's concerned gaze.

"I thought we were over this phase," Jisung murmurs and Minho heaves out a deep breath.

"You took your time waking up, that's for sure," Minho comes to a halt and squats down, placing Jisung on the ground. "Are you feeling okay?"

The world spins a little and Jisung bows his head slightly.

He feels the fingers on his chin and his head is lifted slowly. He meets Hyunjin's gaze and Jisung's pulse quickens from the relief trapped in his brown eyes.

"Thank god," he breathes out and Jisung thinks he looks like he's on the verge of tears.

"What happened, hey? Are you not feeling good?"

"I feel..." Jisung's licks at his dry lips. His stomach churns and his previous thoughts flood back. "I don't know what I feel," Jisung whimpers out. His bottom lip catches between his teeth.

His body suddenly tenses and Hyunjin flinches back, thinking his touch is making him uncomfortable but Jisung lets out a choked noise of pain and his hands reach out, grasping at Minho's jacket. Minho jolts forward at the force and grunts in surprise.

“Jisung?” Hyunjin calls out and Jisung answers with a shrill scream. “What’s happening?” He pants, finally looking up with glassy eyes.

“Fuck,” Hyunjin hisses out loudly. He pushes Minho out of the way who stumbles into Changbin's legs. He helps him find his balance again.

“Jisung...” Jeongin calls out in a weak tone. Seungmin grips him by the shoulders and embraces him tightly, allowing him to blubber against his shoulder. Felix rushes to Hyunjin's side, panic evident on his usually delicate features.

Hyunjin reaches out for Jisung's stomach, but the boy slaps his hands away with a strangled cry. “Somethings wrong,” Felix whispers to Hyunjin. Chan rushes over to Jisung just as he shifts his weight and collapses against him, shivering.

“Help,” Jisung mutters out.

Hyunjin reaches out again, and this time Jisung lets him. His hands press against his middle, feeling for the baby's position. “Oh,” Hyunjin then hisses through his teeth as his hands travel lower to just the top of his pubic bone.

“The baby is engaged,” he looks to Felix, then to Jisung whose mouth is hanging open, brows furrowed. Jisung leans more of his weight against Chan and cries out loudly.

“Engaged?” Hyunjin nods his head and Jisung cries out. “I can’t!” He yells. “I have weeks to go! Months!”

“Sung,” Felix says. He clutches on his hands and it captures his attention successfully. “Breathe with me for a bit, okay? Follow my lead,”

“What does that mean?” Minho whispers to Seungmin who gulps hard. He looks close to crying himself like Jeongin already sobbing into his shoulder. “That means... the baby is positioned to be born,” Seungmin watches as Changbin's and Minho's eyes go wide.

Minho's eyes flicker right over to Jisung who cries out again after a sharp intake of breath.

“You’re having contractions,” Hyunjin announces and this time Seungmin is the one to take in a deep breath and buckle. Changbin holds him by his arm.

“Fuck I don’t know what this all means!” Changbin hisses under his breath. “God this is so messed up,” Hyunjin murmurs and Jisung nods his head through the pain that shoots up his spine, and tears his middle apart.

"It hurts," Jisung cries out. "I'm scared!"

"Hey, hey, let's breathe again,"

Seungmin slowly wanders closer and offers Jisung a hand that he takes right away. His hand guides over his head, brushing wet hair from his eyes but Seungmin's heart drops in his chest, instead. "What?" He catches Hyunjin's attention.

"He's burning up,"

Jisung's dripping in sweat now and he pants louder, haggardly.

Hyunjin reaches out straightway, his palm flat against his forehead. He swears under his breath and Jisung suddenly jerks up, eyes wide.

"What?" Felix whispers to him.

"Oh my god," Changbin whispers out, his legs buckle and Minho grabs him. He stares up at him in horror, his mouth open. His eyes flicker to Jisung and back to him. "Minho... I think you've got blood on you," Minho still and looks down at his shirt. He doesn't know how it had missed the dark stain, but his shirt is black, the mark harder to spot. It's damp against his torso and the sudden realisation fills him with dread.

"Hyunjin," Minho looks over at him with wide eyes, pointing to his

shirt. The young doctor frowns and slides over on his knees and lifts Jisung's right thigh. "Fuck, we need to get moving," He tells Chan. The eldest nods once and bundles Jisung up in his arms.

"Hey," Jisung croaks out just as Chan begins to walk ahead. "What's going on?"

"I'm getting you to Mydar," Chan answers.

Seungmin spots the puddle that formed on the ground where Jisung was sat seconds before and gasps out. "Don't make him panic," Hyunjin hisses to the rest of them. Felix rushes to Chan's side, wiping tears from Jisung's face and muttering reassuring words.

"That's... that's not normal," Seungmin mutters, letting go of Jeongin. The younger clutches at his hand instead. Changbin reaches for his other hand while Minho stares at Hyunjin.

"Hyunjin," Minho clutches onto the doctor's arm. His eyes are frantic and Hyunjin grabs one of his shoulders. "He's going to be okay,"

"He's haemorrhaging!" Jeongin cries out and clenches his good fist. "You can't say he's going to be okay when we're not even in Mydar yet!"

"I'm not going to let anything happen to him!" Hyunjin yells back and throws his bag on over his back. He looks back to Minho and Changbin. "Get your guns out, if they don't welcome us warmly do whatever you must to get him safe,"

“This is fucking insane,” Minho mutters under his breath but he doesn’t waste a second pulling out his weapon.

“Come on,” he steps into pace with Hyunjin. “Get moving!”

→

Chan runs the fastest he’s ever run in his life. Faster than the time he ran from those men in white after murdering his whole fighting ring family. After escaping his mad mother.

The footsteps of the others behind him are enough reassurance they’re okay, but it’s Jisung now who he’s focused on. He tenses at each pain that rips through him, but Chan panics when he sees him fading. He begins to not able to form a sentence when he asks if he’s okay— which Chan knows he’s not, but he needs something to ask him regularly because once he begins to not answer, Chan fears they might make it too late.

Minho speeds forwards just as the form of something in the near distance is clear, its structure visible and near. So, so close.

The colony that lives in the structure shaped as a massive tree is there, so close. Its trunk is thick, but Chan knows that’s not where the colony resides but in its many bubbles up in the air, connecting with each other to form a canopy of homes.

“I haven’t felt the baby in a while,” Jisung then croaks out with a sob and panic soars so strong through Chan he almost stops. But he keeps on going and he looks down at him and is horrified to see him pale, his lips dusty, free from the rich pink colour they usually hold and his eyes are so dim, but there’s so much still swimming around in them.

Chan tries to ignore the soaking of blood that grows larger each passing minute, but it’s almost impossible to ignore the thick stickiness that clings to his clothes, sticking to his skin.

“We’re almost there, just hold on Jisung, hold on,”

Jisung does hold on, he grips harshly at Chan's forearms every time he feels the pains return, gripping so hard Chan is sure he'll bruise up badly, but he doesn't care.

It becomes apparent that the pains are hitting closer when they're so close to the entrance because Jisung doesn't stop gripping onto his arms or crying out in agony. And it turns out, his cries didn't just alert Chan and their crew.

Four men, dressed in green-plated armour are standing a hundred meters ahead, at the entrance to Mydar. They're so close, it's just there, but they come running, weapons angled to injure.

“Hyunjin!” Chan comes to a halt as he screams for him.

The men don't stop running. They're coming at them right on and Chan moves quick, leaving a sobbing and near hysterical Jisung in Hyunjin's embrace while he Minhoo and Changbin spring into action.

"Three against four!" Changbin grunts out, but his eyes strangely twinkle as he looks at Chan. "Not for long!" The eldest calls out before they finally crash.

A blur of dirtied clothing against green metal is all Jisung can see. His mind is muddled over in the thick haze of something he has never felt in his life. He's focused on one thing and one thing only. The safety of the cause of the searing pain racking through him.

A sharp punch to the mans face that Chan hears first has enough force packed behind it for him to lose balance and during that time Chan snatches his rifle from his hand and promptly whacks the butt of the weapon over his head, knocking him out.

He looks over briefly and finds Minhoo tackling one of them to the ground, probably due to his cocked gun. Chan doesn't go over to help, Minhoo is a force to reckon with and Chan is confident in his friend's abilities to handle his own weight, no matter how worked up he is. Minhoo thrives on that but Chan fears the aftermath when his energy is overflowing, his anger unmanageable.

Chan sees Changbin kick his leg up, hitting the much taller's head.

The fourth man is standing closer to the door, his gun ready to

shoot.

“Don’t!” Chan roars at him. The man is clearly much older, at least a decade and Chan sees him hesitate just as he hears an intolerable scream sound out. The man shakes the slightest bit. Chan has to fight himself from turning around.

“You may be a threat to our colony,” The guard speaks but Chan sprints forward, a fist crashing against his nose. “My friend is *dying*,” Chan hisses out. “Sorry for this,” he swiftly apologises before he grips at his hair and thrusts his skull against the metal of the trunk-like structure.

And Chan turns around and his previous words weigh down on his tongue.

Jisung is limp by Hyunjin's side, mouth parted in a silent scream, his hands pressing between his thighs now coated in blood.

Chan slams his fist against what he hopes is the button to open the fucking doors.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HI EVERYONEEEE so totally not going to go on about how that just went :o

so first of all, i just want to stress that there is gore in the tags andddd it isn't just a one time thing and i do have a history of writing rather... bloody scenes so if anyone is uncomfy with it dw ill always but TWs!!! i did in my last long fic too! with that out of the way i also want to make sure you guys are just aware of the tags just in case bc we are heading further into this fic and the tags are very important!!

AGAIN thank you guys so much for always leaving the nicest comments i feel so loved u guys are the absolute best AAAAA <33

ALSOO!!! i did post a oneshot a few days ago!! (a repost of a fic i wrote back in 2019 but i decided to edit it for skz instead lol) and if anyone is interested here is the link for it!!! [oneshot!](#)

I LOVE YOU GUYSSS MWAH!!!

19. 18→

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi!! obviously a direct continuation from last chapter, so take care as in there is several bloody scenes :] and Jisung's trauma is finally mentioned, only briefly but it is there! take care!

Jisung had thought that arriving to Mydar would be a very positive experience. He thought maybe Chan would pick him up again, twirl him around him happiness again.

Jisung had not expected this to be the way they'd arrive.

The entryway opens up to an elevator, something Jisung has never seen before, but Hyunjin carries him in without a second thought. The space is wide, but not quite large enough to fit eight people comfortably.

"Jisung," Felix pushes through and helps Hyunjin to hold him upright. "I feel," Jisung sucks in a deep breath. "I think I'm going to die!"

"No, you're not. You're not going to," Hyunjin pats his cheeks and Jisung gasps for air. "I made a promise," Hyunjin concludes but Jisung shakes his head, gritting his teeth as he roars in pain. "I don't believe in promises," he puffs out through waves of pain.

Felix grasps onto one of his hands, flinching briefly at the clamminess and the drying blood.

“We’ve made it now, Jisung... just a little bit more,” Seungmin begs. Jisung meets his eyes briefly. Seungmin’s eyes are wide, glazed over with fear but Jisung feels as if he’s slipping, falling down into this abyss.

“I haven’t felt the baby move since we got close,” Jisung then cries out. Chan sucks in a deep breath and shudders deeply. Felix’s eyes zone onto him. “Still?” He whispers out.

The clarity of fear and desperation in Jisung’s eyes is overwhelming and Minho, who is buzzing with anger and the adrenaline of punching some guys lights out is crumbling into that anger, deep and hot. But he bites down on it because uncertainty and fear is thick between them all and with the dark crimson that is stuck to him, to Chan, Felix and painting Jisung’s lower half red, Minho doesn’t have the ability to even breathe.

He can only watch, so hopelessly as Jisung’s sobbing suddenly changes into obvious panic and his screams of pain become more agonising.

Chan kicks the elevator door, agitated they haven’t hit the floor yet.

“They can’t die,” Jisung wails out and everyone freezes briefly. “Jisung,” Changbin breathes out but Hyunjin shoots him a harsh look.

Minho feels like he’s trapped in that cave again with him. Back then,

when Jisung was shivering from real cold, not from fevers racking through him. That chill filled with dread is now feverish fear and pain that chokes them all.

“You’re both going to be safe,” Hyunjin assures him and Jisung cries out, biting on his lower lip. He gives him a weak nod.

Minho recalls the first time Jisung had ever felt them move. Jisung's panicked expression and then his sudden relief after deeming them alive and well. Minho feels himself fill with heavier dread.

Chan kicks at the doors once more and Changbin squeezes his bicep, their eyes on Jisung.

But then the doors open and whatever hope they had crashes like a fallen star then embedding itself deep inside the earth.

The light is bright and it shines down on them, making red glisten and just as Jisung heaves out a deep breath, gasping before roaring loudly, Chan and Minho instantly are out, tackling the men that were guarding the entrance.

Sirens are blaring out and Jisung buries his head in Jeongin’s lap as he follows him to the ground.

“Changbin! Hyunjin! Back up!” Minho hisses out, his gun cocked at the sudden storm of green armoured men.

Jisung's hand pushes down against his lower stomach and a sickening gush is heard. "They moved!" He cries out and they don't miss the relief filling his tone.

Jisung lifts his head for a few seconds and he witnesses briefly Chan grabbing one of the guards aiming a weapon to the elevator by their neck and slamming them down to the ground, winding them.

"Jisung, Sung," Seungmin calls out. Jisung pants and meets his eyes. "You have to stay with us, okay? You can't leave,"

"You're speaking as if you think I'm going to die, too," Jisung mumbles. Seungmin's mouth remains open as tears glaze over his eyes. "No," he whispers but his voice breaks.

"Nothing is going to happen to you, Sungie," Felix then tells him. His voice is strong, but there's a nasally tone behind it, giving away that Felix hasn't kept dry eyes.

Jisung manages out a weak humming sound. "Sung! You have to talk to us!" Jeongin cradles his head and helps Seungmin and Felix gently place him on his back.

"I'm tired," he pants out after brief silence. "If I could fall asleep..."

"Hyunjin!" Felix screams at the top of his lungs. The doctor turns

back and his eyes go wide at the sight of Jisung struggling to maintain consciousness. He pivots out of the way from the guard's punch and flies back to the elevator.

Changbin screams out and throws his body to the doctors and they crash down against the ground just as a loud bang pierces the air. Jisung flinches and his droopy eyes open more.

“Jisung stay with us!” The three other boys are sobbing now, clutching onto the boy that barely registers their cries.

Minho yells out again and there's a sudden clang of metal as a body hits the ground, a cocked gun sliding over the elevators entrance.

“Jisung, come on!” But he's pale, almost grey and the pool of blood around him is growing larger and larger each passing second.

“I want... destruction,” Jisung whispers incoherently as his eyelids flutter. “What?” Hyunjin frowns. Felix grabs onto Seungmin who hugs him tight. They cry into each other's shoulders, shaking and in near hysterics.

“What is going on!” A booming voice then fills the space. Hyunjin looks back briefly to see a woman, tall and broad wearing an elegant pale green dress across the hall.

A gasp falls from Jeongin's lips. "A woman?"

The guards halt and stand tall and still. The three in the hall slowly retreat to the elevator.

"Are you the leader?" Chan calls out. Her brows furrow lightly before she nods. "I am. And what business do you have here? Covered in blood?"

Jisung tenses when a contraction hits again. He cries out again, suddenly awake and not slipping from the land of the living.

"Our friend," Minhoo grunts out, pointing to the elevator where he's tensed up, holding onto Hyunjin's and as he roars out.

"Oh my is it contagious?"

"No!" Minhoo then yells at her. "He's having a baby! Can we get directions to the fucking medical ward!?"

"A baby? Oh, that's a lot of blood for a birth. Quick! Follow me! You guys," she points a finger to the men in green. "Help your others out,"

"There's more outside," Changbin states in a shaky voice. The woman mouth twitches. "Of course," she breathes out. Chan rushes back to Jisung and Hyunjin helps him carry him before hurrying to follow the

woman in green.

“I haven’t seen a woman since my mother...seven years ago,” Jisung murmurs. The stench of blood is thick that Chan almost chokes on it. “Me either,” he replies in a grunt.

They hurry after the woman blindly. Citizens of the colony stare and whisper as Chan runs after their leader in a haze. His arms are shaking with the added weight of Jisung after fighting, but Chan pushes himself and tries his best to ignore the dripping of blood.

“Hyunjin,” Jisung pants out, his hand falls limp over Chan's arm. The young doctor reaches out and grips it, squeezing it as he runs in sync with Chan. “Can you do it?” Hyunjin's brows furrow slightly at his question and he thinks for a brief moment before he understands.

“I don’t want anyone else to do it,” Jisung adds on and Hyunjin sucks in a deep breath. “Of course, I’ll do it. I’ll keep you safe,”

Jisung sighs out deeply, relaxing his tense body. “Good,” He murmurs out. His eyes flutter before closing for a few seconds. Hyunjin can see him slipping, his complexion losing its honey glow each passing moment and panic soars through Hyunjin's gut.

He lets out a growl and the woman turns, stares wide-eyed for at least a second before she understands. She picks up her gown, kicks off the shoes she was wearing and runs, her bronze locks flying as she speeds on.

Chan forces himself to pick up his pace, despite his heart beating so rapidly it's beginning to hurt. The padding of footsteps behind him tells him the others pick up their pace.

Screams begin to erupt from unsuspecting citizens going about their day as their leader runs by, knocking some of them out of their paths and then eight deranged looking men running by, leaving a trail of blood in their wake.

"Everyone out of the way!" She yells just as they turn a corner that leads into a large circular room with large cloudy glass doors.

"It's just here!"

It had only taken less than three minutes, Hyunjin knows this because another pain hadn't hit Jisung but just as the woman slams a button and the doors open, Jisung cries out again, but his voice is weaker this time, his strength fading.

Chan rushes through the doors with Hyunjin. The quiet peace in the medical ward is shattered the moment they storm in, the leader right behind them, panting.

Nurses, dressed in pale green aprons turn to face them, shock apparent over their faces. "Your Grace! What is going on?" One questions the woman in the green dress. She just shrugs and sends her a look.

Hyunjin spots a free bed and ushers Chan to place Jisung down. "Someone get blood in here! Quick!" Hyunjin shouts as soon as

Jisung's head hits the pillow.

Chan takes a wobbly step back as a shuddered breath emits from his mouth. He looks down at himself and his head spins at the blood covering him. He steps back again just as the others storm in.

A nurse hands something over to Hyunjin, but he shoves it back in their hands and points to the stand next to the bed. She seems perplexed but follows his orders, scrambling for things.

“Is he a doctor?” The leader asks Chan and the eldest is knocked out of his spiral to look into her jade eyes. He gulps and nods. “He is quite young, is he not?”

“Hyunjin is one of the best,” Chan utters out.

“Jisung!” Felix cries out running over to him. Seungmin follows him but Jeongin is frozen at the door with Changbin clutching his hand. At some point, Minho had come to stand with him. Chan must’ve missed it with his momentarily space out before.

“You’re covered, too,” Chan whispers out. Minho bites down at his lip and scoffs. “I wouldn’t worry about me right now, Chan.” The eldest swallows thickly.

One of the doctors wanders over to Jisung, his white coat bright underneath the artificial lights. Chan squints a bit.

And the moments that follow causes Chan to stare, his heart thumping and his skin slick with cold sweat.

Jisung's eyes fall from Hyunjin's sudden comforting gaze to a pair of aged blue ones. His pulse quickens and Jisung's eyes go wide in terror.

The white coats, the sudden hand on his thigh.

Jisung cannot control anything in that moment. He falls, back into that abyss he was stuck in for seven years. Terror is what Jisung finds.

Red against white is back, haunting him now is not the presence of just his memories but physically. Jisung's lungs burn and he lashes out of whatever imaginary restraint he had been put in the past.

“Don’t touch me!” He screams out first, before crashing into Hyunjin's side. The doctor heaves at the sudden impact, but he supports his weight. He kicks at the older doctor that is watching with wide eyes.

He snatches scissors from Hyunjin's hands that he had just been given by a nurse and holds them to his own neck. Hyunjin's eyes go wide and he moves quickly, grabbing the scissors back and pinning the hysterical Jisung down to the bed.

“Hey,” he whispers gently. His eyes are still wide, glazed over and Hyunjin knows he’s not yet back.

“You’re okay. You’re not there now,” he sees his eyes begin to change, soften. Hyunjin continues on. “We’re in Mydar right now. Remember? You’re safe here now. You’re with everyone, hey?” Hyunjin looks back briefly his eyes wide with fear. “Chan!”

The moment Jisung's eyes flicker to the eldest of their found family, he breaks and clings onto him, hiding his face into his broad shoulder, breathing in that secure petrichor scent.

Hyunjin pulls back, meets Felix's teary eyes, then Minhoo's who's breathing heavy, one leg outstretched. “Is there a private room we can take him to?”

“There is,” one male nurse steps forwards but Hyunjin bites down on his lip. “Could... we only get females present, perhaps? Uh... Jisung has been through a lot... I think male medics would trigger him,”

“But you’re—“ One nurse starts. “Jisung trusts me. We have been through a lot together. All of us,”

“This way!” One of the ladies nods, gesturing to the back right of the room. Another two of the female nurses step up and begin to help wheel the bed away, another taking the blood transfusion line the first nurse had somehow got in.

“Felix,” Jisung cries out weakly, his eyes flickering between Felix and Seungmin. “Minnie...”

“Come on,” Changbin pulls at their hands and they follow Jisung into the other room.

“Hey,” Hyunjin stops them at the door. Jisung let go of Chan as another pain hit him and the women take him into the room by himself. “Felix, Seungmin and Jeongin,” he addresses the three and they look up at him, all with teary eyes. “Are you coming in?” Seungmin and Felix nod without a second thought but Jeongin hesitates.

“I... I don’t know,” he admits. He’s looking a bit pale himself. “I think I might make it worse instead of supporting him.”

“Okay you stay with the others, then,” he begins to walk in, but Minho speaks up. “Why can’t we come in?”

Hyunjin turns back and glares at him. “Jisung only wanted those three at first, then he asked me. We’re not overstepping boundaries, Lee Minho,”

“But—“

“It’s not going to be pretty, Minho,” Hyunjin then hisses. Jisung

screams louder this time he shakes his head. "Jisung wouldn't like it. Now I have to go,"

"Hey," Minho grits out, his finger curl around Hyunjin's wrist. "Whatever you do, don't put one of those coats on,"

Hyunjin stills briefly and nods. "I wouldn't dare,"

He then speeds over, the two younger boys following him to Jisung's side.

"We're going to need more blood," One nurse says and another hurries over to grab some, shutting the door in the others faces.

Minho punches the wall nearest to him as soon as it shuts. "Fuck!" He yells out and Changbin grips at his hands and breathes out deeply. Minho fights it at first, looking like he's going to push Changbin's lights out but he caves in and begins to breathe with him.

"You boys might want to get cleaned up in the meantime," The leader has wandered over to them. Chan jumps at her voice. He looks up at her, she's at least got ten centimetres on him, even taller than Hyunjin.

She senses the obvious displeasure they radiate but she shakes her head at them. "At least in twos, then,"

Chan clears his throat and nods. "You guys go first, I'll stay,"

Minho slaps him across his shoulder and frowns at him. The woman raises her eyebrows at him and gives him another look over. "Perhaps I would accept that if you were not covered in blood,"

Chan's jaw tenses. "You two bloodied ones, follow me," it's a demand and as much as Chan and Minho would like to wait at the door, waiting for any updates on their friend's condition, Chan is not stupid enough to deny her. Especially after breaking into her colony and doing harm to more than a few guards. Not to mention the blood trail Jisung had left all around the place.

"Okay," He tugs at Minho's arm and he follows with disdain.

"So," she starts as they leave the medic bubble, turning her head to look at them. "I would be guessing you'd like to stay for a while?"

Minho scoffs loudly again and Chan purses his lips at him. He settles down a bit at Chan's warning.

"Would it be too much to ask for a long while?" Chan asks in a mutter. She cocks her head at him. "How long are we talking here?"

Minho cuts in with a drawl. "Permanent. Got anything?" Chan glares at him again. Minho's lips press into a thin line and he crosses his arms over his chest.

“Sorry about him, he’s a little weary from our journey.” Chan apologises and the woman chuckles.

“I can give you a semi-permanent residency while we sort out a larger one? Presuming you eight are wanting to stay together?”

“Yes,” Chan breathes out. “Please. That’s wonderful. Do... we not need to give you anything?”

She sighs loudly and begins to walk. They follow after her. “We can sort that out later. Let’s just make sure you’re all comfortable while your friend has a baby, yes?”

“Are you really not going to ask?” Minho wonders aloud as they walk. She sends him a look that Minho doesn’t really understand.

“It would take an idiot to realise you have been through a rather rough trot lately,” Chan sighs out loudly. “Anyway, this is the emergency residency branch we created... and had never really had to use... until now,”

“Thank you,” Chan stands there awkwardly, not sure how to thank her. She smiles. “Just go in, I am to report your rather... special intrusion in my system.”

“Oh,” Chan swallows. “We’re not bad people,” he finds himself saying

and the leader chuckles.

“I do not believe you to be... your name, perhaps?”

“Chan.” He tells her. “Bang Chan.” She smiles at him and turns her gaze to Minhø. “Lee Minhø,”

“What must we call you... Your Grace?”

“My title is just fine, however, my name is Fern Mydar, not that anyone uses my name very often. Such a shame,” Fern sighs loudly.

“Mydar...” Her lips twitch upwards slightly. “My family was the one to found this colony, hundreds of years ago.”

“Ah...” Chan whispers out.

“But do not think you are off the hook so easily,” Fern reprimands them with a small frown. “I will be back to question you all. And your motives, I am rather concerned about this whole ordeal,”

“Of course, Your Grace...” Chan gives her a small bow and she laughs. “No need of that. Now go get cleaned up and hurry back to that friend of yours,”

→

Jisung has pondered over moments like this for seven years. It had brought fear upon him every time his mind wandered to it.

But Jisung doesn't have the strength for fear now, finally, facing the moment he has feared for so many years.

Jisung had known it would hurt, but even with the fluttering of his slowing pulse, the blood loss draining him, Jisung can feel the rips and pulls of life dragging out of him and its a pain Jisung knows he will not forget soon.

His body feels as if it's being split in half and Jisung could scream and kick if he had the energy but all he can manage out are grunts of pain as Felix places a cool washcloth on his forehead, Seungmin squeezing his hand trying to comfort him.

Jisung's eyelids are heavy, breathing seems like a chore and when he loses most of his strength, he can only cry out at the burning sensation he begins to feel. Felix grabs his other hand and his eyes drift to Felix's eyes, his mouth that's moving, but Jisung cannot hear it.

Felix's face has become familiar, comforting and even in the haze of the pain, the burning Jisung feels himself relax at his friends face.

Seungmin's hand runs over his head, brushing hair from his eyes.

Even throughout whatever abyss Jisung is falling into, he feels himself regret.

Regret that he had been so stubborn and afraid of commitment back then. He could've been friends with them earlier, able to confide in each other there. But Jisung knows he's a different person now, and back then Jisung had barely been able to tolerate his own presence. That tells him enough and brings an odd sense of comfort.

The white walls are gleaming in his mind, but when he takes another shallow breath, his vision clears from memories of stark white and is met with soft green. Jisung's brows furrow as Hyunjin's hand slips against one of his bloodied thighs.

Felix looks back, to Hyunjin for a few brief seconds but it feels like ages and when his gaze returns, he's nodding and Jisung's senses suddenly roar back to life at the sudden tug.

He roars loudly, his body overtaking. He meets Hyunjin's eyes quickly and he nods.

"You've got it," Felix whispers to him. Seungmin squeezes his hand again.

And then suddenly, the pain is gone and in Hyunjin's hands is the tiny flutter he had dreamed of for so many nights.

Jisung's head spins and he sighs out, his chest heavy, suffocating and just as Hyunjin lifts them for him to see, Jisung loses his grip and tumbles right down that abyss and is met with the calm dark. Jisung dissipates right down into it.

Notes for the Chapter:

WWWWWOOOOO there we go, a very dramatic chapter!! there's going to be quite a few more dramatic chapters so here's to the first taste of that i guess!!

the rest of the Mydar chapters are honestly quite exciting in a few ways :PP a few people were worried about how they broke in and i can only say that it does create a few problems :O But I'm so excited to share the rest of the chapters!! i hope you guys like them!!!!

thank you for all the comments!!! i read them all reply to them as much as a possibly can!! I've just started back at school and its my senior year so I'm going to be pretty darn busy but i have tried to make a good schedule and I'm really hoping i can stick to it so i have time to write too!! i really enjoy writing and its something i want to prioritise since i find it quite relaxing!! so yep!!! i might be a bit late to replying to comments but i promise i will fit it in!!
THANK YOU!!!

[my twt!](#)

20. 19→

Changbin flinches and grasps onto Chan's arm when a booming sound is heard in the room. Jeongin gulps and the four of them share worried looks.

The door suddenly bursts open, and Minho's heart drops at the women that storm out, blood adorning their scrubs. Jeongin lets out a strangled cry and Chan hurries him into his warm embrace.

"Excuse me! Please make way!" A woman's voice rattles out and Minho freezes for a split second before moving from the doorway and just as he does, that same woman rushes by, a tiny, soundless baby bundled in a blanket tightly to her chest.

"Oh god," Changbin pants out.

Minho races forwards, but Chan catches his wrist.

"Let go of me," He growls out but Chan shakes his head. "You're mad," Changbin then speaks out, reaching for his other arm. Minho huffs and tries to break out of their grasps. "You act rashly whenever —"

"Let go of me," He then whispers low. His eyes are narrowed and his chest rises. "I'm not that same stupid kid,"

Chan's grip on him losses. Changbin looks at him and shakes his head.

“Then go,” Chan mutters. “I trust you,” Changbin begins to open his mouth but Minhø darts away quickly, trailing after the nurse that had zoomed away moments prior.

Minhø freezes in the doorway to the room the woman had run into.

The tiny baby she had run with is lying still as the nurses rub towels down their tiny frame.

“Excuse me,” a hand lands on his shoulder and Minhø flinches and looks down at the woman peering at him. “You’re not supposed to be in here,”

Minhø's hands shake. “The baby...” He whispers out and her mouth parts as she nods. “Your baby is in the hands of the best we have,”

Words form on the tip of Minhø's tongue, that it’s not his baby, but it fails to come out. Instead, he nods and allows the nurse to lead him closer to the baby.

“Dad is here,” she announces and one of the nurses holding a towel smiles at him. His stomach flips and he barely recognises her presence after gazing down at the tiny thing. He sees their arms twitch, toes wriggling and Minhø sucks in a deep breath.

“Why aren’t they crying?” He murmurs out, his heartbeat picking up.

He tightens his hands into fists, trying to control the shakiness of them.

“She was born prematurely, in most cases the lungs aren’t quite developed yet,”

She .

Minho's vision swirls and the nurse talking to him notices his sudden paleness. “Hey, maybe you should sit?”

“No,” Minho gulps out, shaking his head. His eyes stay on the tiny girl, her toes wiggling ever so lightly.

“Most dads will follow the baby instead of staying with the wife,” Another nurse perks up. Minho frowns, lips pursing. “Did you see your wife before?”

“He’s not my wife,” Minho grits out coolly. The nurse peers at him and her mouth opens before she nods in understanding. “I’m sorry, we shouldn’t have assumed anything,”

Minho just scoffs softly. “It’s not a very simple situation anyway,” He grits out and the nurse decides not to press any further. Minho's glad.

Minho steps forward, closer to Jisung's daughter when one of the women shove tubes up her nose.

“For oxygen,” And just after she speaks, a gurgle and then a sharp, shrill cry fills the room.

Minho's heart, that had been beating in his throat suddenly goes back to his chest, picking up in relief. “Oh my god,”

Her cry is high pitched, strong and Minho's heart rattles in his chest. Minho wishes it come differently though. Jisung shouldn't have gone through such a difficult birth and missed his daughter's first cries. Minho just knows he'd cry for sure. Not how he did in the cave when he realised her presence, not the spine chilling sobs that had escaped him.

Jisung would burn brightly, and the tears he cried would be warm, his face soft and his heart swelling.

But he's not here to see her breathe her first breath. Minho is and maybe he thinks he owes Jisung something or maybe Minho isn't as strong as he thought him to be. Because the moment that cry pierces his ears, something inside Minho bursts and his heart clenches, a warmth oozing out of it.

He watched her cry, one twice and on the third cry, Minho breaks and before he can catch himself, he's crouching down, head in his hands as he sobs, hot tears wetting his palms as a tiny daughter cries out her first breaths.

Chan gulps, his vision stuck to the ceiling as he wills himself not to cry.

Felix squeezes at his hand, comfortingly. "He'll wake up. Hyunjin has said so," Felix brushes his thumb over Chan's calloused knuckles. "That's great," he says as his eyes wander back down to Jisung's sleeping figure. "As soon as the baby was born, he passed out," Seungmin says. "He did so well for holding on for so long,"

"I just can't believe our luck," Changbin sighs. Seungmin sits on the arm of the chair Changbin is sat in. The elder snakes an arm around his waist. "That one of us actually got pregnant from the institution in the first place is rather unlucky... but this all," Jeongin winces when he looks over at Jisung's pale face.

"We all thought we had time," Hyunjin sighs as he walks back in, now cleaning his hands with a wet towel. "Where's Minho?" He asks he feels Jisung forehead for his fever. "It's going down," Seungmin breathes out in relief.

"He ran after one of the nurses," Chan tells him and Hyunjin raises a brow. "Shouldn't we go get him...?" Jeongin asks but the elder boys shake their heads.

"Minho's rather stubborn... especially after being riled up on so much emotion. It's best if we leave him for him to come back to us on his own time,"

“Yeah, last time I went looking for him after he was upset, he broke my nose,” Changbin laughs. Seungmin raises a brow at him, grimacing lightly. “No hard feelings, of course, we were still learning about each other back then,”

“But hey,” Chan breathes out shakily. Felix squeezes his hand again. “The leader has given us our own place to stay,”

Jeongin nods his head, smiling. “It’s big! And it has actual beds!”

“Wow! Really?” Felix beams at their younger friend who nods back at him with two thumbs up. “And its own living quarters... a kitchen too! A proper one that’s not hundreds of years old!”

“Oh nice,” Hyunjin muses with a nod of his head.

“She’s coming back though.” Chan then says. “She doesn’t trust us yet,”

“Understandable,” Seungmin sighs out. “It’s not exactly everyday your home is broken into by eight grubby guys and one pregnant and in labour,” Changbin winces. “Definitely,”

“We should go, shouldn’t we?” Jeongin turns to Hyunjin who nods.

“Come on then, I’ll show you guys the way,” Chan tugs on Felix’s hand who nods and smiles.

The room is dark when Felix steps in. A soft rustle sounds out and Felix stands still while Chan touches the lamp by the bed, lighting up the room enough to see each others faces clearly.

“Why were you sitting alone in the dark?”

“How did you know where I was?”

“I saw you slip away once we made it here,” Felix sits himself down onto the bed next to Chan. The mattress is plush underneath him and Felix sinks down into it with a sigh. “You washed up?” Chan's fingers slip by the softer fabric of a white shirt that he wears. “Yeah. It was nice of them to provide more clothes, too,”

“God knows we needed them. Those other clothes will probably always smell of sweat and mud,” Chan scoffs lightly. Felix hums and slowly reaches out to holds Chan's hands.

“Look...I know you have this notion that you need to be strong for the rest of us, but Chan,” Felix shakes his head at him. “I can tell you're not okay. You don't have to keep acting and keeping everything to yourself. You know that? I said you could lean on me,”

“I don't need—”

“Chan,” Felix cuts him off and he squeezes his hand. “You don't need to but up a barrier for me,” Chan stares at him and then he nods, barely but Felix sees it.

“Now that we’re here and safe, you can confide in us like you let us confide in you,”

“I’m fine—“

“Chan,” Felix breathes out. He clutches at his hand tighter and Chan responds back by a gentle squeeze back.

“Talk to me. I know you’re not okay right now,”

And like that, the concrete dam Chan had made over the past months begin to crack by the pressure of the past events.

He crumbles down, walls crashing and the emotions he had held in for so long for the sake of the others tear out, running raging rapids down his face.

Felix pulls him close and his shirt muffles the sob that elicits from his mouth. “Just let it out,” Felix whispers to him, running small fingers through his clean hair.

Chan has never been one to rely on other people. He had learnt from a young age to trust himself, to only rely on himself because he was the only one he could trust to get to the places he wished to go.

He had only ever confided in his mother, but that was taken from him and he had never confided in anyone since that night of broken glass and shrill screams.

Chan could hold all of his friends up and take care of them, that was enough for him. It made him feel useful like he was needed and quickly he had fallen into that role, never once putting himself before one of his friends.

The past months had been a struggle for everyone. Chan felt the pressure too, but he put it aside in favour of helping.

He had thought he would never break. That they'd get to Mydar and everything would be fine.

Now, Chan worries about their chances of being allowed to stay. They had broken in, hurt the guards just so they could save Jisung and his kid. He doesn't regret it, because Chan has grown to only need their new family. The outdoors weren't that bad when they were all together, but when he had thought about the possibility of losing one of his own, all reason had flown out of him.

The image of Jisung bloodied and fading, clinging on so desperately to save both him and the child he's fretted over all these months—Chan has never quite felt such fear and desperation in his life. He had seen his mother go insane, the death of Minh'o's mother, the executions of his ring family. Chan has seen a lot in his life, but then, Chan knew he could nothing to help then. This time was different. Jisung's and his baby's life was in his hands this time.

Chan's legs are aching, shoulders stiff but he wouldn't change it because he had saved their lives.

“You did so well,” Felix praises him gently, fingers drumming across his shoulder blades.

“I don’t know how I’ll ever forget,” Chan sobs out. Felix’s hold on him tightens. “All the blood, everything he said... Felix he thought he was going to die. His baby too...” Chan pulls back to look at him. Tears run down Felix’s own face but he smiles gently through them, brushing Chan’s rapids away, but they keep coming. An overflow that was too long overdue.

“They’re okay... we’re all okay, Chan.”

The eldest sniffs and nods. Felix pats his cheeks and that same soft smile takes over his lips. Chan leans in, his forehead pressing against Felix’s own.

“Has anyone ever told you that you feel like sunshine itself?” Chan whispers.

Felt breathes in and hums. “No. But if I’m the sunshine I’m going to push all your dark clouds out of the way,”

Chan pulls back, his hand landing gently on the younger’s waist.

Felix gleams, shines like nothing else in Chan’s eyes. Like the light that streams through the clouds, brightening the world, and leaving his eyes coated in liquid gold.

“We’re going to be okay now,” Felix says again. Chan just gulps, his

tears slowing.

Chan had once tried to swallow his emotions, but the light from the sun peeked in, breaking his walls and cradling those fragile feelings in small, soft hands.

Chan leaps off the ledge, flying into the sun's warm embrace.

“What if I asked to kiss you?” Chan then mutters. Felix's eyes lighten slightly and when his lips stretch, Chan finds his answer in the sweet blend of sunshine and petrichor.

→

Felix stirs awake from the warm light hitting his face.

He sighs softly, trying to wiggle out of the warm and comfortable embrace Chan has him in. When the blankets fall from his body he shudders a bit, wishing for the warmth again. Instead, he wanders over to the window and murmurs in awe.

Mydar is built up in the sky, its branches stretching high and high. The golden morning light streams in through the window. The world down below is breathtaking in all its glory. Greenery shining gold in the early light, the rivers that surround the far side of Mydar's trunk,

Felix breathes out heavily and brings the curtains to a close. He turns and looks at Chan's face once more and smiles gently.

His eyes are swollen from all his tears last night, but Felix has never seen him looking so content since he's known him. Felix creeps out of the room, careful to not wake him.

Felix should probably sleep more himself. After all, by the light, Felix knows it's barely morning but he knows he won't fall asleep again. After the long journey they've had, Felix is absolutely sure he could sleep for days, but Felix has always been rather resilient.

He would sleep if things were different, he thinks.

But his mind is racing now, awake to thoughts of how Jisung is, how his tiny baby is? Felix finds himself worrying about Chan and how much he had sobbed last night, so much his mouth tasted like nothing but the saltiness of tears. Felix's heart thumps in his chest and heat rises to his cheeks, his ears, probably painting them a soft red.

Felix knows their entrance to Mydar wasn't a welcome, at least. But as rash and dangerous it had been— even the risks that still are apparent— Felix wouldn't change that because they had saved Jisung and that tiny life they had all grown to eventually love.

But their risky and brash decision could lead to problems now.

Felix just wants to be safe. He wants to be loved in peace. A peaceful life is what he wants now, a mediocre life. Felix wants a quiet life, filled with the warmth of love, a family that he can tell this adventure to.

But Felix would do anything to stay with his new family, whether it be filled with peace or filled with even more disaster.

His hand glides over the soft fabric of the lounge situated in the round living room that leads to all the different rooms. This place has provided more comfort than any place they stayed in for the past eight months and it hasn't even been a whole twenty-four-hours.

Felix breathes out a steady breath and drags his feet across the soft carpet, the softest thing he has felt under his feet in what he thinks is years.

The rooms back the facility were small, the beds thin and the mattress springy that dug into his spine every night. The mattress he slept on last night with Chan felt like he was sleeping in the soft embrace of a cloud. Scratchy sheets rubbed against his legs every night for years, and the carpet under his feet, rough.

Mydar is a whole new sense of comfort in more one way.

Felix presses the green button near the sliding doors and they open soundlessly. He steps through the doorway and heaves out a sigh.

Mydar feels comforting in a way. The walls green, resembling the trees Felix had never been able to see until Chan and the others had broken him out. It's peaceful.

He turns a corner, and the walls open up, walls rounding until he's standing inside a circle, the ceiling made of glass. People are already awake, some walking with small children, others carrying a basket of fresh produce. Felix wonders where they grow such nice looking crops up here.

Felix merges in with the crowd, behind a mother with a toddler waddling next to her, clutching at her much larger hand. It brings a smile to Felix's lips.

There's an explosion of scents around him, then and Felix's stomach growls at him, his mouth-watering.

A hand then grabs him around the wrist and Felix flinches as he's pulled softly to them.

"You might get lost and not be able to find your way back to your friends if you keep on going," A soft voice fills his ears and Felix then meets soft hazel eyes staring at him.

"Oh," he breathes out in relief at her uniform, one of the nurses that had assisted the birth yesterday.

"None of them are awake yet," he replies gently. Her grip on his wrist

falls and she nods her head. His stomach rumbles again and she laughs softly. Felix knows he's staring then, his eyes wider and his mouth parted in shock because he just doesn't remember the last time he's seen a woman.

Her head cocks to the side and Felix gulps, shaking his head. "I'm sorry... I just haven't seen a lady in such a long time..."

Her brows raise up then and her mouth opens but Felix's stomach cuts in again. "Why don't I take you to the breakfast hall?" She suggests with a small laugh and Felix smiles gently before nodding.

The hall is large, some parts separated with glass walls to keep out the sounds of thousands of conversations. Felix and the nurse end up in a rather empty section, and Felix is glad because the amount of noise is quite different from what he has become accustomed to over the months it took them to arrive.

"When you guys arrived," The woman starts softly and Felix looks up at her over his bowl of steaming berry porridge, the spoon halfway in his mouth. Felix's tastes over the eight months of travelling through the wild had become used to the gamey taste of hunted meat, the deep earthy taste of any vegetable they found and now Felix's tongue is overwhelmed with the tastes of proper food.

"It wasn't the best... obviously but anyone could take one look at you all and realise you didn't intend on harming us... your friend," she gulps and Felix's grip around the warm wooden bowl tightens. "It was clear that you only wanted to get help,"

Felix swallows the food in his mouth and hums softly.

She leans over the table slightly, sleek black hair flowing down her shoulders as she does. "But... you mentioned you haven't seen a woman in a long time?" A frown marks her features. "What do you mean?"

Felix heaves out a shaky breath.

How did they not know of such a tragedy, Felix knows but it feels so wrong that no one else knows of the deadly disease that had almost wiped out the other continent.

"The eight of us," Felix drops his spoon into the bowl and takes in another deep breath. "We are not from this continent." He starts and her lips part, obviously intrigued.

"We spent eight months journeying to this place," Felix huffs out a small chuckle because looking back, they hadn't expected any of this. They didn't even know if Mydar was real or not at the start, they didn't know of the flutter inside of Jisung and they had never thought they'd enter Mydar with one reason instead of the one they had originally planned for.

"Eight months..." her jaw drops.

"There's another colony, another settlement on that continent. They call it the Capital," Felix's gaze drifts. "There's a big city, technology is advanced... so advanced..." it sends a shiver down his spine. "The city is full of people... it seems rather amazing when you first look at it. People are well fed, jobs are available steadily, but if you look

closer,” he blinks, looking back at her.

“There’s a slum outside those tall walls that keep the city people inside safe. People live in mud huts, in a place where tomorrow isn’t guaranteed to anyone,” he stops briefly and she blinks softly. “Did you come from the slums, then...?”

Felix shakes his head. “I didn’t but Jisung did. Right in the middle of it, the worst place one could live. And how fair is that, living in such poor conditions when people inside the wall were fed, warm and slept well every night,” The nurse gulps.

“Maybe it was karma?” Felix then whispers and he straightens his spine. “It was twelve years ago when a new disease was born. I don’t know where it came from, still to this day but it ruined everything in the Capital, in the slums. Maybe it destroyed the continent, who knows?”

The nurse leans away then, but Felix shakes his head. “I cannot carry the disease or catch it,” he tells her and she settles back into her previous position.

“It killed all the women off like flies, anyone who was born with the curse of a womb. The infection spread so fast that it had claimed over hundreds of lives in not even a single week,”

“What?” She whispers and then her eyes widen. “All the women are dead?” She hisses out and some people look over at them. Felix stiffens and shakes his head gently. “I do not know... I don’t think so some went into hiding, some homes were built to give them refuge away but I don’t know if they survived,”

“Then,” she gulps. “Humanity was being wiped out?”

“The disease hasn’t lifted,” Felix replies. It is true. Even in the facility, Felix had heard news of women still suffering.

“It was only months later that the government decided they needed to do something for the sake of humanity surviving,” Felix licks at his lips.

“You were there when Jisung gave birth,” she nods, a frown between her brows. “I saw your face, how shocked you were to see him,”

“I have delivered many babies in my life,” she pauses briefly. “I haven’t gotten your name yet,”

“Felix,” he replies quickly and she smiles. “Kaya,”

“And no delivery I had helped with previously could even compare to what just happened... it was rather shocking, I cannot lie,” she admits and Felix nods, a small hum vibrating in his throat.

“I am like that too,” Felix tells her softly and he watches as Kaya’s smile falls, shock marring across her face.

“The government took young boys only three years after the disease broke out, finally figuring out how to make males carry without allowing us to contract the disease,”

Kaya's tan complexion has paled a fair bit in these past few seconds. Her lips purse and she gulps, hard.

"Why... why would you say yes to such a thing?" She whispers in horror. Felix's lips purse because the question is so ironic because Jisung had never said yes to anything, hadn't been able to say no, but he still yet was the first to have the first child born out of such... disgusting desperation.

"We were in danger. Some of us thought it would be a good thing..."

"And the others?" Felix's shoulders slump. "Some people aren't as lucky as the others." He answers simply and he can only see Jisung's empty eyes as he speaks.

"It was deemed a good thing," another voice joins and Felix smiles at Seungmin, Jeongin trailing right behind him.

"We too are like Jisung and Felix."

"Are you all?" Kaya asks then, looking between the three of them. "The eight of you?"

Felix shakes his head as his friends join him at the table. "The four of us only,"

“Ah... then how...?”

“It’s quite a story,” Jeongin tells her. “One will not tell unless someone agrees to speak about it,” *Jisung* .

“I don’t mean to be rude... but if you can fall pregnant shouldn’t Jisung have been more careful?” Her brows are tightly knit together and Felix finds himself mirroring her expression. “And the father?”

“I do not think you understood...” Seungmin drawls out and she cocks her head.

“Is the man with the baby, not the father? He didn’t sleep a wink in fear something would happen to her,”

Felix lets out a small sob at the sudden information. Jisung has a daughter. The tiny flutter, a little tiny girl. Seungmin holds onto his hand while he breathes out heavily, too.

“Minho isn’t the father,” Jeongin tells her. “He got pregnant in the facility,” her face falls and her eyes glaze over. “Oh,” her voice is weak.

“I just assumed because he hasn’t left her side since we brought her in,”

“And you let him stay without confirmation he’s the dad?” Jeongin frowns at her. Kaya puts her hands up and shakes them, “No, not at all! We did think he was, he didn’t say he was, but anyone could tell he’s with you guys and he seemed to have that fatherly heart to

him,”

Jeongin actually scoffs then and Felix almost joins him.

“Minho, a fatherly heart?” Seungmin whispers and Kaya shrugs. “Well... when she finally cried I’ve never seen a new father breakdown like that,”

And Felix's heart drops in his chest. “Minho?”

Kaya looks at them, takes in all their expressions and a tiny smile pulls at her lips. “I’m taking it he’s not the most loving figure in your group,”

“He tried to drown me in the lakes we washed up in,” Jeongin tells her and she snorts.

“Ah, maybe you’ve unlocked his hidden affections,”

And like that, it slaps Felix across the face.

“No way,” he whispers and his friends look at him. He shares a worried look with them and then stands. “Can you show us where Minho is?”

“Oh, of course!” Kaya stands and they follow her out of the hall.

“What’s wrong?” Seungmin asks him. Felix purses his lips, “I think Minho’s not okay,”

“Why, because he’s suddenly showing a soft side?” Jeongin asks and then his face falls. “Yeah, okay that’s weird,”

And when they enter the room, they find him slumped against the transparent shield that Jisung's daughter lays in, his eyes locked on her.

Minho doesn’t even look up at them until they’re right next to him.

“Is Jisung awake?” Minho asks in a gruff tone.

“No,” Felix whispers.

“Look at her,” Minho whispers out. “She’s so little,” Seungmin whispers in awe. Her nose looks like Jisung’s, the curve to the bridge to the nostrils and her lips are similar, but just fuller than her dads. Her eyes are closed, but Felix can make out long eyelashes that brush against her still red cheeks.

Felix's heart clenches in his chest.

“Can we talk Minho?” The oldest then looks up at them and Felix swallows at his reddened eyes, and the dark purple bags hanging heavy underneath his dropping eyes.

Felix has never seen this side of Minho. So raw and openly drained of energy. Even throughout their journey, Minho had been one of the most resilient, next to Chan and Changbin. He had never wobbled on his feet or seemed to need a break.

Minho was a formidable wall to anyone, but now Felix swears he can see right through him and he breathes, one and then twice because he seems so unfamiliar now.

But Felix leans in, his lips hovering over his ear before he whispers,

“Do you like Jisung?”

→

Notes for the Chapter:

AAAAHH SO here we are!!! Chanlix has awakened
god I've been so excited to finally write at least one
ship getting together and here we are, getting there!!
Again thank u all so much u guys make my week
with all your lovely comments MWAH I LOVE YOU
ALL!!!!

have a lovely week!! see you next Sunday!!! <3333

Notes for the Chapter:

hi theres talks of ableism in the last part but its not graphic at all but it is rather important just to show how this world works now

Minho's pupils quiver.

That's enough for Felix, for now at least.

The blonde boy turns back to his friends and smiles softly. Their gazes are glued on the little baby, eyes sparkling in wonder.

“Hey,” Felix whispers out gently. “Maybe you two should go check in on Jisung now?” Seungmin takes the hint quickly and gently tugs on Jeongin’s arm whose eyes continue to linger on the baby until Seungmin has dragged him out of sight.

Felix's gaze returns to Minho who has sat a lighter straighter in his chair. His own eyes have lifted from the sleeping baby to Felix's face. Minho's own face is covered in that blank stare he has perfected and Felix feels himself shiver at the intensity of the elder's eyes.

“The nurses think you’re the dad,” Felix begins and the corners of Minho's mouth purse, his brows furrowing. “I know,” he replies and his voice has a raspy edge to it as if it’s been dried out by cries.

“Why didn’t you say that you weren’t?” Felix edges on and Minho’s nose twitches, a telltale sign that he’s growing annoyed.

“It wasn’t really the most important thing at the time, I thought,” Felix blinks at him and then sighs.

“Minho...” He settles in the chair next to him finally and reaches out for one of his hands, but Minho flinches it away before he can grab it. “You know we have been travelling together for a long time... it’s not a bad thing you like him,”

Minho heaves in a deeper breath. “It makes sense I guess,” Felix shrugs his shoulders and then reaches out to massage at the elder’s shoulders. Minho allows him this time.

“I saw how you looked at him when you were working on the boat. Sometimes I saw how you’d stay awake when he’d sleep by you, that time he slept in your arms for the first time,” Felix sighs out as Minho’s eyes shine. “How do you know all that?” Felix laughs, gently and smiles. “Jisung is my best friend... we have this connection and if you haven’t noticed Jisung is rather oblivious to feelings so someone has to try to understand what he’s feeling,”

The shine in Minho’s eyes fades suddenly. “But I do have to give it to you, I didn’t figure it out until the nurse said you cried over his kid,” His face hardens once more, his eyes piercing.

“I didn’t—“

Felix shakes his head at him. “I don’t care Minho,” he breathes out and it sounds so tired that Minho’s face softens slightly. “If you cried or not.” He finishes quietly. “You don’t have to admit it to me if you

don't want to, but after eight months together I think our bonds have strengthened enough to allow each other to know how we feel,"

"I don't talk about feelings," Minho tells him and Felix stares at him for a few seconds.

"What happened to you and Chan?" He breathes out, shaking his head. A frown dents its way into Minho's forehead. "What do you mean by that?"

"Did you both decide to just not talk about anything, ever?" Minho blinks at him, Felix sighs louder this time. "You've been friends all your lives but have you never sat down and, you know, gone over all the feelings you have over the journey? Not at all during the eight months?"

"I don't see why we should have," Minho mutters and Felix's mouth parts in slight shock.

"Chan cried all last night," That gains his attention. Felix isn't an idiot at all. By the red-rimmed eyes and his darkening eye sockets and chapped lips, he knows Minho has been crying for more than a few hours at least.

A knot forms deep in Minho's brows. "Is he...is he okay now...?"

"See?" Felix raises his brows and tilts his head to the side. "It's human nature to feel, Minho. That doesn't make you weak or whatever you think it does,"

Minho breathes in, his usual grimace returning. "Is Chan okay?"

"And that, too. Chan is your best friend, right? So why haven't you asked him instead?"

"Because I came here instead," Minho hisses and Felix's body temperature spikes at the sudden aggression in the elder. "Chan is fine by the way," Felix finally answers and he can see some heat redact from Minho. "What I meant is why you never talked to each other during the eight months."

Minho blinks, his gaze faltering.

"When my mother died," his voice sounds heavy like he's reliving the times where he watched his mother die.

Jisung had reminded him of his mother's painful death. The blood, the heat radiating from his skin, but where her womb had been poisoned by the unknown disease, Jisung's was bursting with life waiting to be born.

"Both Chan and I lost the only maternal figure we had," Felix listens, even when Minho stops, taking deeper breaths every now and then.

"Times were hard. We were the working class, the middle class you could say I guess. We lived by working, feeding ourselves by our hard

work to sow seeds, harvest crops. We were needed there but when she left... by such a horrific death we had both become lost. My father was a good man, is a good man, but we were older than you, aware that the disease was going to do much more than just kill women. So we ran away, desperate to make our own path, to find something that was worth living in such a desolate world.” Minho's head whips as soon as he hears a shuffle, but he returns his attention back to Felix after seeing a nurse exit the room.

“It was live through this all, die anyways in the end and that was it, or fight for something, find a place somewhere,” Minho gulps. “Chan told me about the institution one night, under the stars in the wild. It sounded at first as if it could be a solution, but the more I thought, the more my stomach churned and the more I dreamt about young boys locked away... I was eleven when Chan and I first thought about breaking you guys out,”

“What...” Felix whispers.

“But we were nothing more than children. When I got sick, we realised we were nothing to the world anymore, but children that would grow up into adults and die without a cause because there was no more hope for life. We came back and we dropped the plans because we were stupid children that had gone off with hope. And there was no use for hope in a world so broken,”

“You’ve lost hope...” Felix mutters, eyes wide and glossy.

“But... Jisung's had a baby, doesn't that change things?”

“They broke him,” Minho grits out. “They may have succeeded in finding a way to up the population again, but who’s to say it’ll be sufficient, what if the disease mutates? Jisung doesn’t know what hope is, fuck he doesn’t even know how to process his emotions,”

“What about Mydar...?” Felix gestures around them and Minho sighs, shrugging. “There are women here...”

“It’s not just about women, Felix,” Minho purses his lips. “This world has been doomed from the start. All the wars, the Great War, the separations of civilisations, governments. God the fucking governments. Did you know what ours did? Do you know how many people they murdered on the streets, anywhere because they answered a question with the wrong word?”

Felix blinks at him.

“You think they’re all going to be corrupt and nasty?”

“Well, I’ve only grown up seeing one fucked up government. I can’t see others being rather positive,” he scoffs.

“Then... what if we stayed here?” Minho raises a brow at him before his face falls. “You can’t seriously think they’re going to let us stay here after we almost killed all their guards?” Felix winces at his words.

“I... maybe the leader will be very merciful?”

“God, you really do have a lot of hope,”

“And now I have the answer to why you’re such a pessimist,” Felix shoots back, but he softens quickly.

“Why haven’t you come to see Jisung?”

Minho points to the baby and Felix cocks his head. “She’s not going anywhere,”

“She’s all alone if I’m not here with her,” Felix’s heart warms at the usually cold man’s words. Minho’s eyes shine looking over at her. Felix doesn’t fight his smile.

They spend time just staring at her through the glass. Felix traces her profile with his eyes over and over again until Minho breaks the silence.

“I was scared,” Minho’s bottom lip then wobbles. He catches it between his teeth. “When my mother died she bleed out just like he did, feverish and her womb was so inflamed she looked nine months pregnant,”

Felix’s heart drops in his chest and realises that Minho’s desperation to help Jisung just wasn’t stemmed from his growing affections for him but because of his own traumatic experiences.

“I wanted to stay with him. I remember the day she first moved inside in him and he cried in my arms, saying that they were alive, alive, alive... Jisung means a lot to me and because of that I just knew he would want someone here because he loves her so much... even if he doesn’t really know what that is, I can see it. I saw it in his eyes when he found out about her growing inside him. I’ve seen it all, Felix...”

And he breaks out into tears, allowing Felix's warm arms to envelop him.

“Jisung is hope,” Minho cries out. “And I will not give up on him,”

→

“She’s so tiny,” Jeongin gushes. “Did you see her tiny fingers? I didn’t know babies were that tiny!”

Seungmin gives the younger a smile. “That's because she was born early, she’s extra tiny,”

Jeongin ducks his head in a bow to the nurse in front of the medical ward. Her eyes narrow at them. “Names? Identification? Name of patient you are visiting?”

Seungmin gulps underneath her judgemental gaze.

“Uhhh... Kim Seungmin and Yang Jeongin. We’re looking for Han Jisung?” Her eyes narrow at them. “No ID’s?”

Jeongin grits his teeth. “We arrived yesterday,” he tells her and she raises a brow at them, eyes raking over their bodies. “Ah,” she murmurs. “The ones who broke in,”

“We just want to see our friend,” Seungmin tries again, his tone softer.

She mutters something under her breath that Jeongin fumes at, but Seungmin slips his hand into his and squeezes it tightly. “Go in,” She grunts out while giving them both a harsh glare.

“I think we deserved that?” Seungmin whispers and Jeongin pouts but hums.

A nurse at the front desk inside the ward gives them directions to where Jisung's room is because neither of them can remember where they had run yesterday in the flurry of panic to save him and his baby.

Seungmin reaches a hand out to open the door to the room but he halts his movements when his ears pick up the whispering voices of what sounds like Hyunjin.

Jeongin raises a brow at him and Seungmin halts for a few more seconds before he moves.

“So that’s why you guys looked tense around each other—” Changbin cuts himself off when the door opens.

“You guys are awake already, too?” Seungmin hums at Hyunjin's question. He gives them both a brief smile before going back to attaching a new drip in Jisung's hand.

“How is he?” Jeongin settles near the bed, fingers bushing over Jisung's long lashes that brush by his under-eyes.

“He hasn’t woken up yet,” Hyunjin informs them with a tired smile. Hyunjin stayed with him overnight, making sure that his fever was lifting and his haemorrhaging stopped. “He continued to haemorrhage after the birth but we managed to calm it down... he’ll still bleed though... postpartum things. We just have to make sure it doesn’t get out of hand again. His fever still hasn’t broken either,”

“When do you think he might wake up?” Jeongin questions. Jisung looks peaceful, sleeping soundlessly. Although he is still regaining colour and his tiredness and sickness shows, Jeongin has never seen him look so at ease.

“Hopefully in the next few days,” Hyunjin says. He looks back up at the both of them and smiles gently. Changbin settles beside Seungmin, snaking a muscled arm around his waist. “Did you guys go

and see the baby?”

Jeongin smiles wide and nods. “She’s so tiny...”

Hyunjin's lips lift into a smile. “Jisung did have her,” He slyly comments and Seungmin’s eyes float down to the male in mention. A fond smile etches its way across his face. Jisung has always been the smallest out of them all, structure-wise. Changbin wasn’t tall himself but packed on muscle and a broader frame where Jisung hadn’t.

“I think she looks like him, I can’t really tell because she’s so new,” Hyunjin just smiles fondly at Seungmin’s words. “I didn’t really get to look at her,” he sighs softly and Changbin pats his back,

The door opens again and Felix pokes his head in, a soft smile edging at the corners of his lips.

“Someone,” he says. “Has finally decided to show up,”

Minho walks in after him, grumbling under his breath.

“Nice to see you again,” Jeongin waves at him and Minho rolls his eyes at him. Hyunjin eyes him down, to his reddened eyes, dishevelled hair and the dark circles under his eyes.

“You look exhausted,” Hyunjin tells him and Minho flips him off with a grimace. “We all are, it’s not such a surprise,” Changbin murmurs and Seungmin nods along to his words

“I thought you wouldn’t leave her side until you got the news that Jisung woke,” Changbin admits and Minho shrugs at him. “The nurse is feeding her at the moment,” Minho tells them. “I’m going back.”

“At least shower? Eat?” Minho hums and brushes his fingers over Jisung's knuckles. “Will he wake soon?”

Hyunjin breathes out and shrugs himself. “Depends on how fast his body can recover. It could be days, could be tomorrow,” Minho lets out a shaky breath and just as he goes to open his mouth, the door to the room is thrust open, harshly and a panting Chan runs in, clearly panicked.

“Chan?”

The eldest stands there, gulping and his eyes flicker to everyone around the room.

“I just,” He swallows thickly. “I woke up alone and no one was there... I thought...” Felix is there by his side then, hand reaching out for his own. Chan grips it harder, squeezing it.

Chan has always had rather amazing timing so when not mere minutes later after Felix helps him to calm his racing heart, there’s a knock on the door and then it opens to two women in pale green and yellow dresses, hands held tightly together. Felix squeezes Chan's hand tighter.

“Here you all are,” Fern speaks and Chan stands taller, nodding.

“We have come to talk,”

“I wouldn’t have expected you to come to ask us to dinner,” Chan grits out and the curly-haired woman next to Fern chuckles lightly. Chan doesn’t comment on it.

“Your friend I see is alive,”

“Yes,” Chan says through clenched teeth. She seems calm but she talks with arrogance and it’s rather hostile. “Good,” She breathes out through her nose loudly. “That would complicate things if he had died,”

Chan doesn’t say anything but Minhø steps forwards to her, eyes fuming and his fists clenched by his sides. Seungmin gently pulls him back to Jisung's side instead.

“Something, when I was writing the reports of yesterday's incident, came to me,” Fern stalks around the room, a dominating behaviour. No one dares to move and Chan spots the gleaming green of guards stationed outside the door. “And what was that, Your Grace?” Her plush lips pull up into a smirk and she settles in front of Chan. The eldest has slowly shuffled Felix behind him, shielding the rest of his friends behind him.

“I was being nice yesterday, I was pitying you enough to not ask you any questions but when I think about it something just doesn’t match up.”

“Are you here to clear up our situation or to make us into prisoners?” Chan presses on and the leader shrugs her shoulders. “It depends on how you answer my questions, doesn’t it?”

“Mydar is a relatively new colony. Less than two hundred years old. This colony has only been around since after the Great War,” she raises a brow at them.

“You’re asking where we are from? How we knew about Mydar?” Minho steps forwards, ignoring Chan's cue for him to fall back. Fern eyes him up and down again and hums. “Certainly,”

“We are not from this land,” Minho tells her. Chan wants to cut in but Minho stands so tall, formidable in the presence of a figure that could kill them all if she chose to. Minho was never known to be a coward to anyone who knew of him, but to the people that really knew him always thought his ego and bravery would get him into trouble one day. Chan was one of them. But he doesn’t stop Minho from stepping down because he sees it in her eyes, how they sparkle at his presence, the way his aura is suddenly towering over her own, dwarfing her power. Fern wanted this, to rip into them to see their true strength and motives.

“We travelled for eight months, over land and sea to arrive on this land. We didn’t mean for all this to happen,” he gestures back to Jisung. “And as for how we knew about Mydar’s existence, you’d have to ask him because the whole journey we didn’t know if we were going to even end up in a settlement or just some barren wasteland,”

Fern cocks a brow and turns her gaze to Chan, then gazes around the room.

“You journeyed for eight months to a place you didn’t know even existed?” She scoffs at them and frowns. “Insanity,”

“Desperation,” Minho growls back. That flicker of pleasure in her eyes shines again. Chan grips Felix’s hand tighter.

“Insanity runs in my family,” Chan then speaks up. He looks up at Fern, his gaze unmoving as she comes to hover over him. “Ah,” she mumbles.

“But we were desperate enough to agree to travel all the way here. We had decided that and gone alone with it even after discovering that one of us was pregnant, even though we knew it would be inevitable that we’d be slowed down by that, we kept on going,”

A small frown appears between her soft brows, obviously intrigued as to just why they were so desperate. Chan wouldn’t tell her until Jisung wakes and gives his consent to share their story.

“You eight are something else, I must say. Stupid. So stupid, but rather admirable...”

“You want to know how we knew about Mydar? Why we weren’t sure it was even real?” Chan presses on and that sly smile returns. “Of course,”

“My Grandmother hailed from this place. She was born here, raised into adulthood,” The shorter, curly-haired woman settles by Fern’s side, her head cocked in interest. “Until she was banished,”

Fern lets out a small chuckle. “There have only been two people in existence to ever be banished from Mydar’s walls. The murderous woman that killed for her own pleasure an—“

“And the woman who was kicked out for being a bad omen,” Chan finishes off for her. Fern raises an eyebrow at him before her face falls.

“You surely cannot—“

“Your grandfather kicked her out of this colony with nothing but a bundle that she carried just because they began to fear her she was a bad omen to your colony. The death of the past leader, the deaths of your siblings—“ Fern reaches for his throat.

Minho comes quickly, his own broader hand wrapping around her throat and pushing her away.

“Fern!” The other woman shrieks.

“She wasn’t a fucking bad omen, she was trying to tell people the things she saw, why the leaders were dying—“

“We caught them,” Fern spits at him. “Before I was even born,”

“How?” He asks her even though he already knows exactly how.

“There was—“

“A family residence covered in lily of the valleys?” Fern blinks at him. “Poisonous when digested by humans,” Chan concludes. “My grandmother worked as a kitchen aid before her banishment. She was trying to warn you but no one was nice to her because she couldn’t talk,”

The leader of Mydar is helped back to her feet by the smaller woman who clutches tightly onto her waist.

“She was never insane, she was smart. She knew when no one else did but everyone eventually led her to her own demise because she then believed she was insane, that Mydar didn’t exist but was a fragment of her imagination,”

Fern presses her lips together. “We are over that event. The past belongs in the past—“

“That’s not my main concern right now. They’re all dead now, what’s the point?” Felix breathes in deeply, rubbing a thumb over Chan’s knuckles. “I didn’t know if Mydar was real or not because my own grandmother didn’t believe her own mind. But in her diary, I found the coordinates, the landmarks on the way from her journey to the Capital and I believed it enough to have hope. Mydar was nothing more than a fable of humans living in a floating paradise, a known bedtime story to others but that was enough for me to have enough hope this place was real,”

“Then,” Fern gulps her strong persona weakening. “Why the hell would you be so desperate to reach this place?”

Chan shakes his head at her. “For that,” he says. “We’re going to need everyone awake,”

Fern bites down at her lip, eyes flickering to Jisung, then back up to Chan and the rest of them.

“Then,” she sucks in a deep breath of air. “We will have to finish this conversation when he is awake,”

“That’s it?” Minho hisses at her. The smaller woman hisses back at him but Fern just chuckles gently. “I don’t believe eight young men would spend eight months coming here if they were a threat,” She tries to smile. “I must apologise for my earlier behaviour, I had thought you were spies of some sort,”

“Have you ever seen a pregnant spy enter their target in labour?” Minho deadpans and the corner of her mouth twitches.

“Perhaps there’s a first for everything?”

Chan is reminded of the first time Jisung showed interest in something when Chan taught him about revolutions as she speaks. He remembers his face illuminated by orange flames, absorbed in deep thought.

Chan shivers, a wicked thought poisoning his mind. No . Chan clenches his fists and breathes, but his mind his racked with Jisung's fiery eyes.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi !!! a special early chapter to celebrate my birthday!!! i love updating probably as much as u guys enjoy reading this so I'm so happy to post this early!! there will be a chapter on Sunday as well!! i love you guys and thank you for making my weeks brighter with your lovely words I'm over the moon!! i love writing and i enjoying sharing it even more!!

I'm looking forward to the rest of this year and all the projects I'm going to share with you!! thank you guys for making me feel so loved I'm just so happy :DDD♥

also this chapter is one of my favourites just bc Minho my god... he's coming in hot now so get ready for the rest of this wild ride!!

22. 21→

The darkness is comforting, calming and when it lifts Jisung is met with pain once again.

His bones feel heavy, moving feels like an impossible task, but he manages to shift and when his eyes blink open, soft green walls and dim light greet him. A groan passes out of his dry lips and there's a shuffle of movement before Jisung's gazing into Minho's eyes.

"Hi," he whispers and Jisung heaves a deep breath through his nose.

"I feel like shit," He croaks out and Minho's lips twitch before he hums, passing him a cup of water. "You did go through quite a lot,"

Jisung is honestly rather surprised to see Minho here with him of all people. He had guessed it to be anyone but him, really. He was the most distant, but when Jisung thinks about it, it's always been Minho by his side in times like these.

"You look tired," he mutters to him after taking in his pointed features. The bags under his eyes are heavy and turning a dark purple, his own lips chapped. Minho just smiles gently and gestures to him. "I didn't just have a whole human exit my body," Jisung cringes a little at his words, but his mind finally lands on the thing he had been so desperate for before he fell into the darkness.

"My baby," he gulps, his fingers tighten around the glass he had been drinking from. Minho's eyes twinkle in the dim lighting and Jisung reaches out to grip at his arm, his eyes wide in anticipation. He hadn't heard a cry, hadn't been able to see that face he's been wondering about for so long.

Minho sucks in a deep breath and nods, a smile painting across his lips.

"You have a daughter," he tells him and Jisung sucks in a deep breath before a whimper comes from the back of his throat, his round brown eyes filling with tears. Jisung remembers his promise from the very same night he had discovered her and he clutches onto the

sheets before his head lulls forwards to rest against Minho's shoulder.

The elder tenses for a split second before he moves closer, sitting on the edge of the bed so he can hold him better. Minho's heart thumps hard in his chest as he thinks about just how Jisung might feel. He was there when he realised he was doomed to a fate he had tried his best to run from, but he was there to watch as Jisung slowly accepted it and grew to even love it as best as he could. Minho's bottom lip trembles and he catches it with his teeth, blinking his tears away.

He wouldn't let Jisung see him cry. No.

"She's so small. They say she's allowed to be held, though," Jisung perks up, still caring but he looks right at him. "You've stayed with her?" His eyes shine and Minho gulps, his grip on him loosening. He blinks a few times before nodding softly, getting over his hesitation.

"I thought you would've liked someone to," Jisung's bottom lip wobbles and he grabs the hem of Minho's shirt before his head hits his chest. "Thank you," he whispers.

Because Jisung words that he spoke in the middle of the still nights, words that Minho hasn't forgotten, he had stayed. Even though his exhaustion Minho stayed, thinking what Jisung would do as he watched the baby.

"Because of overmorrow," Minho murmurs back and Jisung pulls back to look up at him. Minho swallows.

"You said that you want to make a better overmorrow for your kid to be born into,"

Jisung breathes in, his tears finally easing. "Would you want to build a better overmorrow with me?"

Minho's heart races in his chest, hard and fast.

Jisung stares up at him while Minho's mind circuits. His mouth opens, and his eyelids flutter.

"I would never say no," Minho tells him in a whisper.

Jisung's blood heats and a small smile flickers across his face. But then his stomach churns with anxiety. Because Minho doesn't know what he had truly meant behind his words. But that's what Jisung has wanted all along. Even that night in the cave he's been craving that madness of destruction.

Jisung will get it. There's no other answer. Jisung will get that destruction whether Minho stands by him or not.

Minho shuffles away from him, the tips of his ears red but when Jisung moves to make himself comfortable, his hands press against his chest, his cheeks reddening and his eyes wider than usual.

"Jisung? What's wrong? Are you okay?" Minho leans across the bed to look at his face. His brows are knitted together and his eyes shine with worry. "I... It didn't occur to me this would happen," Minho blinks dumbly at him.

His eyes flicker to his hands that are pressed against his chest, to his red cheeks and Minho's own face goes red when he realises the cause of Jisung's embarrassment.

"Should I call for Hyunjin?" He whispers and Jisung shakes his head no. "A nurse." He murmurs out. "A nurse, please,"

Jisung is mildly humiliated when the nurse arrives. She has a kind smile and explains things slowly but it doesn't ease the burning of cheeks. Minho quietly sits in the corner of the room while the nurse talks to him. She takes out his iv then, too after making sure he's recuperated enough.

She leaves around ten minutes later, leaving Jisung with a small contraption of some sort, a clean robe that she helps him with. Jisung is left burning red by the time she's gone.

"Why is this embarrassing?" He mutters to Minho when he comes to settle back on the bed. Minho hums and looks at whatever is in Jisung's lap. "It was quite an entrance I'd imagine. I don't remember much, but I almost gave birth in the fucking entrance but my body

doing this is the thing I'm embarrassed about?"

"You're doing very well, considering," Minho tells him and Jisung gives him a soft smile. It's silent for a bit until Jisung speaks up.

"I never really paid much attention when I was in the institution," He admits softly. Minho's eyes flicker back to his face, staying, waiting for him to go on. "I didn't know why I needed to listen to everything they told me when I had no say in it. Maybe they had mentioned it briefly, or maybe it was just bound to happen... I don't know. All the hormones they pumped into me could have something to do with it maybe?" Jisung sighs loudly but then he frowns, deeply.

"But I had a baby, right?" Minho nods at him. "So... that's why,"

"Does it... does it repulse you?" Minho asks slowly Jisung bites down on his bottom lip and huffs in thought.

"I don't like it of course... but I definitely don't hate my baby... it isn't her fault even though she caused all these reactions," he purses his lips and sighs loudly. "I think I can come to accept it... but I don't think I'll ever be able to make amends with myself..."

"That won't be easy," Minho comments and Jisung nods. "But maybe that's better than hating myself for something I couldn't control?"

Minho breathes in, his fingers brushing over the soft skin on his hand.

"But..." Jisung then whispers, eyes shining like roaring flames that Minho has missed so much. "I want to see her,"

Minho sits straighter and his heart thumps in anticipation for that moment that he had been waiting for ever since he heard her cry for the first time.

"Take me to her?" Jisung reaches out for his hand and Minho gladly accepts it. His hand is smaller in his, thinner and softer whereas Minho's hands have been worked since he was a kid. Calloused and board in comparison to Jisung's hands that done nothing but twiddle for seven long years.

Jisung swings his legs off the bed and with Minho's help, gets himself on his two feet.

“Oh,” his brows furrow and he looks up at Minho who watches him with a soft concerned gaze. He takes a small step and Minho reacts quickly, slinging an arm around his waist as his legs give out, pain shooting like fire through his body.

“Oh fuck!” Jisung hisses through gritted teeth. Jisung's hair tickles Minho's cheek and he then realises how close they are. Minho can feel his breathing against his face. He stands up straight again, his arm not moving from Jisung's waist.

“I don't think I'm going to forget this pain quite soon,” he speaks through gritted teeth. “God, I almost bleed out but I remember that pain of getting her out,”

“I don't think it would be pleasant,” Minho mumbles. “Felt like fucking fire,” Jisung tells him. He looks back into his eyes and juts out his bottom lip.

“I'm going to see her,” Jisung says his chin lifting higher. “Could you ask a nurse for some he—“ Jisung cuts himself off with a squeak as Minho bends, his other hand gripping the back of his knees and lifting him swiftly into his arms. Jisung clutches onto his shoulder while he stares at him with big eyes.

“Perhaps a warning would've been nice,” he tells him and Minho can only chuckle softly. Jisung settles into his frame and Minho swallows hard just hoping his heart won't betray him and give him away.

“You know,” Jisung speaks as they exit the room. Nurses and doctors turn to look at them and Minho feels Jisung tense in his hold. He tilts his head, hiding it in the junction of his neck and shoulder. Minho stares them down and not one dares to question where he's taking him.

“Every time you've picked me up, something bad was about to happen,” Jisung whispers and Minho snorts softly. “Do you think I'm walking us to our impending doom?”

“Dunno,” Jisung replies softly. “You threw us both off a cliff the first time.”

“And then running to Mydar,” Minho mutters and he gets a hum from Jisung. “How long have we even been here? How long was I out?”

“We got here two days ago. You’ve been out for two days. It’s late in the night now,” Jisung doesn’t reply for a few minutes until he sighs.

“I like the colours,” Jisung comments as they walk. Minho occasionally bumps buttons with his hip that open doors. “It’s much nicer than the facility...”

“I think they have a thing for trees,” Minho chuckles. “The shape of this fucking place is a tree, even,”

“Trees are cool,” Jisung shoots back.

Minho bumps into the last button and sucks in a deep breath. “Are you ready?”

“I waited eight months,” Jisung tells him as he lifts his head from his shoulder. “I want to see my daughter,” Minho smiles, wide and Jisung stares for a bit, a little taken back from the brightness he had just erupted with.

Minho shuffles forwards until they reach a nurse in front of a little glass bubble. She turns when they near and smiles at Minho before her brows lift when she notices Jisung.

“Oh?”

“I want to see my baby,” Jisung tells her firmly. Her mouth parts and she nods quickly. “Of course!” She looks at Minho for a moment, frowning gently. She hadn’t gotten the memo yet that Minho wasn’t the father. Minho just hopes she’ll keep her mouth shut.

Minho slowly bends down and helps Jisung back to his feet. He keeps his hold on him steady, allowing Jisung to hold onto his hand when he grunts in pain. The nurse scoots out of the way, allowing a clear view of the tiny sleeping baby inside.

“You can hold her if you want to?”

Jisung doesn't answer. His eyes are glued to her tiny body. Minho clutches his hands tighter when he feels him tremble. His eyes map out her profile, dipping at the curve of her small nose, little red lips.

“She's beautiful,” He whimpers out, voice shaky and soft. Minho has never heard this tone from him, but it makes his heart so warm and full of something he even doesn't know how to pinpoint. “She's yours,” Minho whispers to him. Jisung eyes flicker to him and Minho's heart squeezes in his chest. Not in pain like he had been used to over the eight months of knowing Jisung and travelling, but with the warm feeling of satisfaction... of what Minho thinks might be love.

“Mine...” He watches as his hand falls to his abdomen where it settles for a few seconds before he presses it to the glass. “My daughter,”

Minho nods at him, slow and gentle and he watches as his teeth pull in his bottom lip and how his brows knit together tightly. Minho pulls him to his chest in time as he lets out his first sob.

He holds him tight, firm enough to remind him of his presence but gentle enough that he can still move in his hold.

He cries for a while, sobbing and muttering things under his breath that Minho can't quite catch but he guess all the same. All the things he had said in the cave, those whispering promises that had first cast Minho's body into a block of frozen limbs now turns his blood into a soft simmer of warmth.

Jisung pulls away, eyes red and the skin around those fiery eyes swelling. Minho reaches out to wipe his tears from his face, now knowing from these past few days that leaving them there will itch and burn at his skin.

“Do you want to hold her now?” Minho asks him in the gentlest whisper he can manage.

The apprehension is so clear across Jisung's face that the warmth that had soared in his veins cools a bit to turn into sorrow.

Jisung doubts himself even after all these months of constantly allowing himself to bond with his unborn child but now, in her presence all his fears and worry are etching at the surface and Minhø has seen him conflicted before but the waves of emotion that cast over his face almost give him whiplash now.

“I... what if I’m not good enough?” He mutters tiredly and Minhø’s heart cracks tight then.

“Hey,” his hands are still holding him up and he pats them down his side tenderly.

“You’re not alone. You’ll never be alone again. You’re going to get through this all. With me. With the rest of us,”

Jisung’s bottom lip wobbles but he nods, not coming back with a pessimistic remark as he usually does. Maybe because he really wants to believe that this time?

“Then...” he turns to the nurse that stands awkwardly a few meters away. “Can I hold my baby now?”

And nothing has ever made Minhø's heart feel so full when Jisung holds his tiny daughter for the first time.

When the nurses had asked him if he wanted to hold her, he wanted so badly to say yes. He wanted to cradle her fragile body and stare at her little face without a barrier between them. But Minhø had given them a firm no because there was no way he’d allow himself to cuddle her before Jisung had the chance. Minhø had given Jisung the comfort of knowing he had stayed with her, giving him the peace of mind but he wouldn’t ever step over a line they hadn’t even created.

The moment she was settled in his arms, Jisung breaks out into tears once more. Muffled sobs escaping his throat while Minhø runs a soothing hand down his back.

She squirms in his hold, her little tiny feet kicking up. She’s just bigger than the length of Jisung’s forearm, but Minhø knows she’d fit

perfectly in a single arm of his. Minho watches for minutes that turns into hours as Jisung gazes down at his tiny creation with so much love swimming in his eyes.

And those feelings Minho has tried to suppress crawl back up inside of him, making camp right inside the walls of his heart.

→

Jisung has a hard time leaving his daughter, but the night is deep and Minho's own eyes are dropping looking at Jisung nodding off, his daughter already asleep.

He looks up at Minho, eyes wide and shining. "Would you... hold her?" Minho's eyes widen a fraction but he nods, firmly and Jisung manages a tired smile.

"Hold her head," Jisung whispers as Minho bends, his arms tucking underneath her tiny body. Minho looks up at him just as her warmth slides into his hold. Jisung eyes gleam and Minho can't fight the smile that blooms across his face.

Jisung holds his breath as Minho stands, his tiny daughter cradled safely in his muscled arms. Jisung's heart thumps.

Minho gazes down at her with fondness in his eyes and Jisung fights the tears this time.

Jisung grips the sides of the chair and hauls himself to his feet. Minho's eyes are fixed on him as he does, but they float back down to the baby. Jisung grips the sides of the green robe and swallows thickly. Minho looks good with a tiny baby in his strong arms and something swirls in Jisung's stomach.

"They forced a drug into me before they got me pregnant," Jisung then says. Minho's cheek brushes by the babe's soft hair as he focuses

his eyes on him. Jisung's eyes fall to his sleeping daughters face, a soft smile paints itself over his lips.

Minho waits for him to speak. He stays quiet, relishing in the warmth of the tiny body he's finally holding.

"And after that, the little sleep I ever got was plagued by nightmares of losing babies I hadn't ever had. They wanted to awaken something inside of me, so I could love them as a mother would. Bonded before birth," Minho swallows the rock building up in his throat. Jisung reaches out and cups her face with one hand

"That is what they claimed anyways." Jisung lips quiver but he breathes his next words out. "I carried her. I made her but they expected me to be a monster that wouldn't love a child that I had spent all my energy on growing... and I know without being tampered with such horrible things I would love her just as much as I do now,"

Minho takes a step closer, close enough for Jisung to be able to brush by his daughter. His fingers gently trace over her soft face. Minho reaches out his free arm to wipe a tear that rolls down Jisung's cheek.

"I would've died for her if that is what it came to,"

Minho's breathing halts.

"I would have told everyone what it is I wish to do. I know I would've because I started to do that, Minho. I thought I was going to die when we arrived..."

Minho's hand lingers against his skin, fingertips taking in the smooth surface. "But I held on, not just for her but because I need to see it happen, I will not give in until I see it,"

Minho hums in response. Jisung frowns at him, cocking his head to the side as he looks up at him.

"Are you not going to ask what it is I want?"

Minho takes a step around Jisung, opens the door to the incubator

she's been staying in and ever so gently places her in, making sure the blankets underneath her are smoothed out for her comfort. Jisung reaches out to touch the underside of her foot. Her toes curl around his fingertip instinctively and Jisung bites down on his bottom lip.

"If you wanted people to know about what you want, you would've said it before you thought you were dying," Minho replies as he shuts her crib. The nurse wanders back over to them and Minho reaches out for Jisung's arm before gently bundling him into a hug.

"What's this for?" The younger whispers. Minho breathes in his scent, not terribly pleasing since he hasn't been able to wash unlike the rest of them, but it's oddly comforting to Minho. It reminds him of those days where Jisung would smile at him as he worked on the boat, the nights where he would occasionally snuggle up to him. The night where he had first felt the fluttering movement when he had cried to Minho that his baby was alive.

"For being so strong," Minho praises him quietly. "For being yourself," Jisung pulls back to look up into his eyes.

"Then I think we should thank everyone else in the morning," Jisung mutters and Minho can't help the fond smile. Jisung doesn't understand the hidden meaning underneath his words and Minho is glad in a way, because they've all been through too much— Jisung especially and Minho's own selfish desire for him will not get in the way of this crucial healing time.

Jisung's emotional intelligence is stunted— not his fault at all, but Minho will not take advantage of that. Never.

Jisung needs time. To grow as a person, to figure out what his purpose is, how to express himself without harming himself or others and Minho will not sabotage any of that.

That flickering ember that is Jisung will one day roar, Minho will make sure of that. But Minho has vowed to himself to be the water, easing the pain that might come with such glorious burning.

Minho lifts him slowly, his body groaning at the effort. He hasn't slept much more than a wink since the baby was born and he's

beginning to feel it.

“That we can do,”

Jisung hums, quiet and low in his throat

“I’ll take you back, yeah?”

“Not the medical ward?” Jisung asks hopefully and Minho hums. “The nurse said you were able to come back when she left,” Minho tells him and Jisung nods his head at him.

“She did,” Jisung confirms and Minho gives him a small smile with a gentle hum before setting off to their new living quarters.

It’s still unknown how long they have to stay there, they could get kicked out tomorrow after having the discussion with everyone present and the unknown makes Minho’s stomach churn. But the baby, she had to stay here, to become strong enough to breathe by herself... Minho would tear down the whole of Mydar if the leader chose for them to leave.

“You have your own room... but there’s two beds,” Minho tells him as he bumps his hip against a button. Jisung looks up at him and he looks rather relieved. “We thought with the baby you might want some help through the night?”

“Oh... so more than one sleep deprived person,” Minho rolls his eyes as they step into the home. “Better than you never being able to rest. You lost a lot of blood. You still need to sleep as well as you can,”

“I guess so,” his speech is softer, slower and Minho’s own exhaustion makes his speech feel too heavy for his tongue to continue.

He gets the door open to Jisung’s room, ignores the stars twinkling brightly in the sky in turn for focusing on getting Jisung and then his own ass into bed.

Jisung snuggles up in the sheets as soon as Minho gently sets him down. Minho’s thigh bumps into the bassinet on the side of his bed—that wasn’t there in the morning— and grunts softly. Jisung notices and hums, reaching a soft hand to press against the throbbing bruise.

Minho's eyes widen a fraction and he stills. His blood soars in his veins and he clenches his fists, willing his blood to cool back down.

“She will sleep right there...” he whispers, voice trailing off and when his hand falls limp, giving in to the temptation of sleep, Minho breathes.

Without another second to waste, Minho bundles himself up in the sheets of the bed across the wall and as soon as his head hits the pillow—a luxury none of them have had in almost a year— Minho too gives in to the lull of sleep.

→

Chan stares at Jisung who's still bundled up in his bed.

“Are you feeling okay?” He asks him slowly and Jisung breathes out and shrugs. “I’m tired and I can’t walk by myself and,” his cheeks flush bright and he grabs something from the bedside table beside him and quickly hides it underneath the sheets. “Rather sore,”

Minho stirs in the other bed and groans out, throwing a pillow at Chan who just grunts and catches it.

“Could you give us a second?” Jisung whispers to Chan who points back at Minho, rather surprised.

“Oh, yeah sure,” he nods his head after Jisung confirms he does want to be alone with Minho for a bit. “Minho can come get you when we’re done,”

“Okay,” he whispers as he sneaks back out of the room.

“Help,” Jisung hisses as soon as Minho sits up in bed. One arm had somehow come out of his shirt during the night, but Jisung doesn’t

pay that any mind. He grips at Minho's arm and hisses, "I've never had to pee so bad in my life," Minho stifles out a small laugh but takes him into his hold, carrying like he did last night to the ensuite.

"God, thank you," he cries out in relief when Minho helps him down to sit. He then glares at him. "Get out," and Minho doesn't hold back his laugh this time.

He leaves quickly but doesn't close the door behind him so he can hear when Jisung calls him back.

"Just so you don't freak out or anything," Minho calls to him as he leans against the wall. "Hyunjin said you'd still bleed for a bit,"

"How pleasant," Jisung huffs back and Minho's lips stretch into a smile. Jisung has made progress that is rather obvious, like his use of sarcasm now.

"The nurse said I get to decide if I want to... feed her," Jisung tells him quietly after being helped back to his bed. "Oh," Minho looks at him from his bed with soft eyes. Jisung grows more confused by this man each passing day. The look in eyes change dramatically from predatory-like to the softest brown eyes he's ever seen. Apart from Chan and Felix.

"I thought about it last night," He continues on and his cheeks flush bright red. "And I want to... with a bottle," Minho blinks at him, slightly confused. "I'm sorry," Minho apologises. "I don't know shit about babies,"

"Ah..." Jisung looks down at his lap. "I'm sorry for making this awkward. It's just... you've never judged me for anything but we've been through things together so I feel comfortable talking to you?" Minho's heart squeezes at his words and he can feel his own ears heat up.

"It's fine, Sung. I just don't think I'm the most helpful one in this situation," he gives him a small smile and Jisung offers one back. "I can ask Felix to join us for a little bit?"

Jisung nods his head once and Minho leaves before coming back quickly with Felix in tow.

“Sungie!” The boy cries out and bundles him up in a gentle hug. Jisung hums, breathing in his clear and clean scent. “You smell like flowers?” Jisung cocks a brow at him and Felix laughs softly. “There’s a shower and a bathtub!! I’ve never seen so many bathing soaps in my life,” He sighs almost dreamily and Jisung can’t help but snort.

“But hey...” Jisung tries to shuffle back to allow Felix some room but he winces and gives up until Minho helps him shift his weight.

“I um... I wanted to ask you some stuff?” Felix raises a brow and gestures to Minho who’s sitting quietly on the other bed. “Does he stay or?” Jisung blinks a few times in deep thought. “I mean,” a heavy blush coats his cheeks again. Minho has had his fair share of too much information coming from Jisung within the past few hours but he couldn’t care less. Really. It made his heart sit warm and comfortable in his chest just knowing Jisung trusted him enough to talk to him.

“He can stay,” he replies quietly. “I have something I want to ask him after this,” Minho perks up at this but he zones out of the conversation he and Felix make.

He only pays attention again when Felix has left the room and Jisung looks quite a lot more relaxed.

“Is everything okay?” Minho asks him and Jisung hums in response. “I just feel disappointed in my younger self,” he juts out his lower lip and Minho’s blood spikes in his veins. “For not listening in on the few things they’d let me know,”

“So it is normal?” Minho whispers and he nods. “They changed us enough so things could progress ‘naturally’ or as natural as this process can get,” Jisung shrugs his shoulders. “I feel less like a freak now, I guess,”

“Hey, none of this was your fault,” Minho reminds him with a frown between his brows.

"I know," Jisung sighs softly. "But uh I wanted to ask you to take it to the nurses... If that's okay?"

"Oh," Minho blinks softly at him then nods. Jisung hesitantly passes the device the nurse gave him over to him and he tucks his legs closer to his chest, making himself appear even smaller. "Did you not sleep well last night?"

"No," Jisung shakes his head. "I slept fine I just woke up earlier,"

Minho hums softly in understanding.

"Should I let Chan back in?"

Jisung nods, blinking his eyes softly. Minho gives him a soft smile back and a small wave goodbye.

"If they let you," Jisung whispers to him. "Can you feed her?" Minho's heart aches inside his chest and the sudden overwhelming rush of emotions causes his eyes to water. He blinks it away quickly and gives Jisung one last nod before slipping out of the room.

Chan slips in after him quickly, eyes shining with worry.

"If you wanted to just see if I was okay, you wouldn't have come back after seeing me," Jisung states and Chan's brows furrow deeply. "Or I could be showing that I'm still concerned for you?"

Jisung blinks at him before he sits up with struggle.

"I'm alive," he gestures down to his body. "I know you're the eldest and you want to protect us all, but I'm okay now..."

"Are you sure?" Chan presses on and Jisung's gaze on him falters. "I just gave birth to a baby that was the result of the seven years I spent in hell," he replies. "I think I'm doing pretty well considering," Chan swallows thickly. "If it means anything to you, I think you've done so well," Chan whispers as he settles himself down on the edge of the bed.

"Enough of me," Jisung grits out. "How are you?"

Chan seems to freeze slightly, his lips quivering slightly. "What do you mean?" He whispers and Jisung frowns at him, crossing his arms over his chest.

"We just walked for eight months. Travelled across a whole ocean to a whole new continent... I'm asking how you are because I'm pretty darn sure not many others can say they did that,"

"And how many people can say they did that pregnant?"

"Stop making this to be all about me," Jisung begs him. "I know you guys all feel bad for me, and I feel bad enough for myself so can we just, I don't know, congratulate each other that we did this and that I've just had the baby?" Jisung's voice cracks and Chan reaches for his hand to squeeze. "I just want to relax for a little bit,"

Chan nods at him and shuffles closer until he embraces him in one of his warm hugs. Jisung greedily sniffs in the smell of petrichor and whimpers into Chan's shoulder. "That's ominous," Chan whispers to him and Jisung halts for a second before pulling back. He immediately wants to be pressed back against him and breath in his comforting scent.

"What is?" Jisung cocks his head at him, genuinely confused.

"You said for a little bit," Chan tells him and Jisung blinks his frown easing. "I can't help it but feel like you have hidden meaning behind these things..."

"Chan," Jisung murmurs out. The eldest looks back at him and purses his lips. "Please, Jisung, I know I told you all those things about revolts but do you realise they're not easy to do? People die Jisung,"

"How did you know?" Jisung whispers out to him, eyes wide in shock. Chan stands abruptly, hands flying to his head as Jisung confirms his previous fears. Jisung can only watch in absolute shock that he's been found out.

"I don't know," Chan admits. "All these little things, god, Jisung do you realise that what could potentially happen if you try to start a

revolt?”

Jisung stares at him, silent for a while.

“It’ll be the change this fucking world needs,” He replies and that same look Chan had seen in his eyes the first time they met shines bright. Like desolating flames that will burn him to nothing but ash.

“We can’t possibly lead a revolt,” Chan hisses back at him and Jisung shakes his head at him. “I’m not asking any of you to join if you don’t want to,” he grits back. Chan stills and scoffs at him.

“Jisung—“

“I know you think I’m insane, and maybe I am. Those seven years will be years I will never forget and if there is a chance I can stop that all from happening, save people from the same fate I had been so unlucky to not escape, maybe it will be easier. The world is in god damned shambles, Chan. A disease threatened a single colony which lead its corrupt government to change. Evolve into something darker. I am not willing to forgive them and if I have promised myself to burn them to the ground, then so be it. Why do you have to stick your nose in and try to talk me out of—“

“Because we are a family!” Chan shouts at him. Jisung sucks in a deep breath. “Because we love each other. And maybe you can’t see it because you’re so blinded by revenge. But we all love you. We love each other and we will do anything for each other now. You have a daughter now, Jisung. You can’t just dive into something so risky... how long have you kept this to yourself?”

Jisung is quiet.

They are a family.

They did things Jisung recalls doing with his parents. Sleeping in each other's arms, eating together, telling stories. They lived together, with each other, for each other. Jisung's mind swirls at the thought of their newest addition.

“Before I knew I was pregnant,” He answers honestly and Chan

reaches back for his hand. "And discovering you were didn't change anything?"

"I wanted the world to erupt into flames even more," Jisung admits softly and a tear slides down his cheek. "I still do. But... I don't know... why is this so bad?"

"Because I care about you. Revolutions are dangerous and so many people die in every single recorded one. And I cannot risk even the thought of you getting caught as the mastermind behind a whole revolution. I have had my own fair share of pain, Jisung and I wouldn't be able to live knowing that I knew about your plans and didn't bother to try to help you."

"I don't plan to go right now," Jisung scoffs at him. "I'm not that dumb I know there are steps before I can even speak of my ideas,"

"But you got caught early?"

"It was just an idea," Jisung hisses loudly.

"Then..." Chan gulps. "We can wait for a bit. Heal and we can come back to this idea of yours... and see what we can do about it,"

Jisung raises a brow at him. "You're not totally against it?"

Chan gulps and nods his head slowly. "You're not the only one that wishes to see those people burn. You weren't the only one who has suffered at their hands,"

Jisung stares at him with those wondrous fiery eyes of his. Chan shudders. Those eyes, that hellfire that smoulders deep inside Jisung is crawling up each passing day and Chan knows only time can hold back the inevitable force that is Han Jisung.

"Then if we are getting secrets out of the way," Jisung clears his throat and eyes him up and down once more. "Why do you know how to fight so well?"



Notes for the Chapter:

thank you for all the birthday wishes yesterday!! i had a really great day!!! the minsung... u guys were so excited over the tiny crumbs in part one so i hope u are well fed after these two chapters!!! again i cannot thank u guys enough I'm so excited to share the rest of this story with you all!!!

[my twt!](#) come to talk to me!!

23. 22→

Everything in Chan's life has felt like a puzzle piece, fitting in somewhere between the many pieces but not quite where he was at in that point of his life.

Just like learning how to fight.

Chan had his reasons, too many that piled up on each other. His mothers spiral into insanity, her death, Minho's mother's death.

Chan had run away from it all, with Minho in tow. The world was broken, the fumes suffocating him and the government had not one glance to spare them over the rush and panic they had fallen into.

Because the world was broken, far to gone to fix and they were twelve and eleven when they had given up. Chan remembers the night before they left so clearly.

Minho was shattered and he had cried and cried for days on end. He would search for his mother when the sun fell, all his early childhood fears of the dark eating him back alive without her protective embrace. Chan remembered that all too clearly and when they sat in Minho's room, in the dark of night it had come over the both of them that there was absolutely nothing they could do to fix anything.

They couldn't get their mothers back, couldn't save anyone else. They weren't strong enough to withstand working out in the fields all day like Minho's father and his workers.

They were children of this broken world. Children with no use for a broken future.

So they left with nothing but a single bag between them.

But the wild hadn't changed anything. The lack of news made them more anxious than the constant updates and they would wonder, minds hazy with panic.

It had been useless to go out in the wild. A death sentence really. But looking back at it, Chan knows that is what it was for.

To disappear and get it over and done with. Not waste years and years of desolation just to die the all same.

Minho had fallen sick, weak and Chan had panicked. They had gone out seeking something like this, but they were still children. Scared, frail and in need of someone else. Someone older that could offer love and support.

But most importantly, they still had each other. And that was enough for Chan to finally trudge home, carrying his sick friend.

When Minho recovered they made a pact to not speak about it again. Not to bring up their lack of hope, not of their want to dissolve back into the earth.

But then everything had changed for Chan.

Fourteen and still lacking hope for the world Chan had seen Jisung. So small in the government officials arms, wide brown eyes glazed over with terrified tears. From that day forward Chan doesn't only develop a burning hatred for the world but a slither of something had slid back inside him that day.

Chan had seen him thrash and fight in the man's hold and Chan had wanted to help, to go up to them and knock them out cold to save him. But Chan was fourteen, smaller and with no knowledge of how to fight at all.

And that was it. That was the turning point. Chan had learnt after meeting Changbin and he pushed himself harder and harder always thinking of those big eyes so afraid.

Chan tells Jisung this. That it was him all along. That he had seen the beginning of his descension hell and that had been enough for him.

But his own world had shattered at his feet and brought him further into the madness and rebellious thoughts.

Chan had learnt how to fight to become stronger, his young mind already filling with ideas too risky and dangerous to even think of.

He remembered Jisung's eyes when he fought against those much bigger guys that would face him in the area. And that hidden part of himself filled with pure rage and hatred for the world would topple him, filling him with so much adrenaline that it made him much stronger than he would be without thinking about Jisung.

Chan prided himself on his composed self, his level-headedness but when he fought Chan was different. He was a monster ready to rip out throats because he was repulsed and so enraged with the world.

And he became a rampage when all his friends were all murdered right in front of his eyes.

Chan hadn't been present when the ring was discovered but the sound of shooting and yelling, cries being cut off had attracted the four of them. And Chan felt fury, devastation and hopelessness like he had never felt before. He had made eye contact with the man that trained him for years just before he was executed.

Chan had once shared his story with his coach. From his mother to the little boy that years later he'd be able to put a name to that face, and then about that idea of a break out he first thought about after he won his first ring fight. His trainer had called him an idiot, brash and reckless. But then he had told Chan he was strong, formidable, that he was brave and he could do it. He could make the world a better place with his friends.

And that part of his life had been a piece of the puzzle that now fits snugly between his younger years to the present.

Jisung cries silently as Chan tells his life story to him.

“So,” Chan clears his throat. “I made that plan for years. Made it foolproof with my friends and we did it. We saved you four,”

“But that’s wasn’t enough to make the world a better place,” Jisung whispers and Chan breathes in deeply, gulping before he nods.

“I know that,” he murmurs.

“Then to make the world a better place,” Jisung reaches for Chan's hand and gives it a comforting squeeze. “You know what we need.” Chan chuckles out and Jisung can sense the sinister edge of it.

“Hope,” Chan grits out. “Hope.”

“And hope we’re going to have,” Jisung’s eyes shine like the roaring of hundreds of flames gathered in one small clearing.

→

Their talk ends after Jisung's declaration and Minho wanders back in, a smile adorning his face. Jisung looks at him expectingly.

“Did you feed her?” He asks him softly, a shift in his tone from how he was just talking to Chan. “I did,” Minho’s smile broadens a bit. Chan spots the red tinge of his eyes but doesn’t comment on it.

Jisung's stomach then cuts them off with a loud growl just as Minho goes to speak. He laughs instead while Jisung sighs loudly.

“I’ll go get something for you to eat,” Minho waves him goodbye but stops in the doorway. “Hey, what would you even like to eat? They have lots of options in the eating hall,”

Jisung looks down at his lap. “I don’t know... I grew up in the slums so I’ve never really had much. The facility gave the same soup and bowl of rice each day so I don’t really know what I like,”

Minho doesn’t show the sudden crash of his mood to Jisung because he knows Jisung is sensitive about his upbringing in the slums as well as pretty much anything to do with the institution. “I’ll find you something extra yummy,” Minho promises him and scurries off.

Chan looks back at him and smiles softly. “Would you like to come sit in the lounge with us?”

“I would like to see everyone,” Jisung agrees quietly.

Hyunjin checks his forehead the moment Chan sets him down on the black fabric lounge and hums in content. "I was worried you would develop an infection," He breathes out and Jisung swats his hand away with a huff. "I'm fine,"

Changbin stares at him from across the lounge for a good few minutes while everyone else swarms Jisung.

The smallest notices, which makes Changbin shake in his spot. "Changbin?" He calls out, cocking his head with a soft frown. "Are you okay?"

And before they all know it, the man is gripping the side of the lounge as he breaks out into a flurry of tears.

"Binnie?" Seungmin rubs his back and the older man allows him to hug him, trying to calm him down. Jisung and Felix share a look before Jisung shuffles slightly to sit up better.

"Changbin," Jisung calls softly and he breaks out of Seungmin's grasp, wipes his tears with his long sleeves. He looks straight at him, his lips quivering but his tears have stopped. "I thought we weren't ever going to see you again," He croaks out and Jisung stares down at his flattening middle.

"Oh, hey," Felix mumbles. "Of course we were going to see him again,"

"Yeah!" Jeongin pipes up. "Jisung is super strong. I knew he could

do it,”

“I thought I was going to die, too,” Jisung cuts in and the room falls silent enough that he can hear the sharp intake of breath from Changbin. “Jisung,” Seungmin reaches for his hand but he doesn’t take it.

“It was scary,” And tears well in his own eyes as he begins to talk, remembering everything that he had felt in that moment.

“When I woke up I didn’t feel pain for a minute or so, but when I did...I’ve never felt panic like that. And it got worse and worse. It felt like I being torn in half and she... she went crazy at first until I couldn’t feel her expect of the weight of her body inside me,” no one talks over him. Their quiet, some trying to keep their own tears at bay.

Minho stands quietly at the entrance, his eyes watering and his lips pressed tightly together.

“And when we were running to Mydar, when we were right there that’s when I thought that I wasn’t going to get out of this alive. I hadn’t felt her move and I was bleeding so much,”

Their faces show the remembrance of the horror they witness when he brings it up.

“I thought she was dead for a while. Until the guns started, but that’s when I was slipping away. I don’t know how to explain it, but I was numbing and in between all the pains, it was the most bliss I’ve felt in a while. I was slipping from life and I didn’t know how to hold on, I wanted to let go of it because it felt so weightless, so calm and peaceful. But then the pain would hit and I’d remember everything. I remembered my daughter and I was not going to die with her. She was going to live,”

“You both did,” A new voice says and Jisung flinches at it. They turn their heads to see Fern and her partner standing behind Minho.

Jisung grips harder onto Felix and lets out a low whine. His friend holds him closer and whispers to him who she is.

“It’s rather nice to see you alive and well. Not dripping blood all over my floors,”

Jisung's nose scrunches up with disdain. “Ah,” Jisung rubs at his collarbone sheepishly. “That wasn’t one of my best moments,”

Fern shrugs her shoulders and gestures with her hands around the room. “I heard you woke last night, so I came now in hopes you got much needed rest for the rest of our talk,” Minho shoots her a glare and she freezes for a second before smiling softly, the harsh edges of her face smoothing out into a kinder, friendlier look.

Minho stops outside of the door to their residence and turns, meeting Fern

and her small crew following behind her.

“Have you decided this is a good day to come and harass us again?” He hisses, brown eyes harsh and cold. He stands tall, even though she towers over him enough to make him feel small. But Minho outdoes her in presence. His pretentious aura overpowering everything around him.

Fern cocks her head and sighs. “I have come to have the talk we agreed to have when the eight of you were present,”

“If you say anything wrong at all,” Minho growls as he saunters forward, getting up in her space. “I will not just sit around.”

“You didn’t sit around last time, either,” Fern spits back but Minho’s lips curve up into a smile that causes Fern to take a step back. That predatory gaze, that look that could eat anything up in his range of vision cracks something in the proud leader.

“I can assure you that was nothing,”

Fern nods once.

“If he shows any sort of apprehension and you continue on you will stop,”

Fern gulps. “You treat him as if he is a fragile doll,”

“Jisung is no fragile doll,” Minho spits. Because Jisung isn’t. Jisung is

much more than a fragile piece of china. "He is an ember," Is all he says to her.

He is a glowing ember, a spark. An ember that will grow into a roaring inferno and he will not forgive anything that gets in his way. Instead, he will eat it, just as a fire fuels on vegetation.

Fern doesn't deserve to know that. Doesn't need to know what Minho is so sure about. But Minho will do anything to protect that ember to make sure it will rise higher and higher until the world will be left wondering where that tiny ember had been hidden all along.

"We had a conversation while you were still unconscious. I was told I would have to wait for you to be awake before you tell me why you were so desperate to reach Mydar even in such conditions..."

Jisung raises a brow at her and turns to look at Chan who nods.

"Why we spent eight months travelling here while I was pregnant, you mean?" Fern nods her head as she settles on the lounge in front of them. Minho stands behind where Jisung is sitting, looming over him to watch Fern like a hawk.

Jisung swallows thickly and sinks further back into the lounge.

"Because the world is broken," He replies softly, quietly. Fern sighs. "Broken from what?"

“A disease that threatened humanities survival,” Jisung murmurs and Fern’s eyes shoot to Minhø, obviously concerned. Minhø just shrugs at her and she sinks back into her chair.

“It killed women,” Hyunjin speaks up. “It festered in wombs, poisoned their blood and they died within a week, usually,” Fern’s hand wanders to her own abdomen and Minhø sees the fear glaze over in her eyes.

“And you are not infected?” She zones in on Jisung who squirms under her gaze. “No,” he replies.

“So you are a lucky one, then,” she breathes out, relaxing slightly

“No,” Jisung frowns, his voice suddenly gruff. “I am not a ‘lucky one’,”

“This place we came from created artificial wombs from our own cells. Our own DNA and made us grow them as young boys to save the population crisis,”

Fern stiffens in her seat.

“There was an institution where I was for seven years, Felix, Seungmin were there for six years and Jeongin for four,” Fern eyes them all and a frown settles between her delicate brows.

“Chan, Minho, Changbin and Hyunjin broke us out. We were locked in, prisoners basically if you think about it hard enough,” Felix pats his shoulder and shoves his arm between his back and the lounge to hold him tighter.

“We kept going even when we found out I was pregnant because if we went back,” his eyes shine with salty tears. “We could’ve been killed, or worse, locked up again and there was no way we could do that,”

“So you continued on? Didn’t stop to perhaps have the child first?”

“They were probably following us,” Changbin grits out. “They knew he was pregnant,” Hyunjin speaks up. “They would’ve done anything to get him back and we weren’t stupid enough to risk it,”

“Stupid enough to continue travelling, though,” Fern’s partner pipes up with a sigh.

“Desperate,” Minho growls out again. “As we said last time,”

“That world is ruined,” Jisung mutters and Minho just knows he’s spiralling down into that dark abyss he had spent seven years in. Felix catches it too and grips his face with both his hands and talks to him softly, muttering under his breath so it doesn’t reach prying ears. Jisung nods, once and then twice.

Fern stands slowly. “I will allow you all to stay. Recover from your harsh journey and you,” She eyes Jisung down who is still a bit shaky. “You rest well and take care of your baby well,”

Minho clenches his fist. He remembers the apprehension on his face before he held her for the first time. Minho knows he will struggle because he's Jisung, so damaged but so strong and resilient. He's young, emotionally stunted but Minho will be there as that calm water, the waves that can take control when things get a bit too much.

Jisung gives her a small nod. She looks at Minho who just gestures with a jerk of his head for her to leave.

As soon as the leader is gone, Jisung breathes in heavily, gripping at both Felix and Seungmin's hands.

"Gosh," Jisung murmurs before he turns his head to look at Minho behind him. "I'm starving," Minho chuckles and lifts up the basket he's been holding all this time.

"Breakfast is served!"

→

"Oh!" Jisung shakes his hand as the sewing needle pricks his thumb. "Ah," Felix tuts at him. "That's the third time yet!"

"Hey, he just almost died of blood loss I think he's doing good!"

“Thank you Jeongin,” Jisung grins and pats the younger's thigh. “Always on my side,” He beams at him and Felix laughs at him.

“What's up, I heard yelling?” Minho pokes his head into Jisung's room to see all three of them huddled on his bed.

“Jisung keeps poking his fingers,” Jeongin shrugs at him. Jisung glares at him and nudges him with his elbow.

“Oh, what are you all making?” He slips into the room and sits down on the bed he slept in last night, watching as Jeongin holds up a shirt that Mydar had given them. “I’m taking the sleeves up because Jisung’s arms are short,”

“Hey!” Jisung whines out at him and Minho snorts at him.

Jisung hesitantly holds up his creation. A little pink, bunny-like doll in his hand. “For my daughter,” He whispers with a fond smile and Minho's heart skips a beat. “Felix is making a blue one,” Jeongin sings and Felix slaps him with a scowl. Jisung had questioned him before and the fond smile that appeared across his face had told Jisung enough.

“Can I make something?” Jisung gazes over at Minho and he can’t fight his smile when he notices that he’s wearing the jacket he made him. Minho notices and he fingers at the fabric. “Washed all the blood out,” he tells him.

“Come here,” Felix pats the space between him and Jisung. Minho

shuffles up the bed, dodging the bassinet connected to the bed. His weight makes a dip in the bed and Jisung shifts a little closer to him. "I can teach you how to make something?" He offers rather meekly. Minho picks up periwinkle fabric from the pile in the middle of the boys and shows Jisung it.

"Sure,"

Felix stares at Minho a little too long and the elder notices. His eyes narrow at him slightly and Minho's gaze falters after his nose twitches at him.

"I'm going to see if Chan needs help," Felix mutters.

Felix wanders out to find Chan washing vegetables in the sink. Felix sneaks up behind him and picks up a large carrot, inspecting the root vegetable they didn't have the luxury to find during their journey here. Chan jumps slightly, his eyes widening when he spots the blonde boy.

"Where did you get all this from?" Felix points to the sink full of vegetables and Chan smiles. "One woman saw us enter," Felix grimaces and Chan agrees with him with a nod. "And obviously noticed Jisung... uh she gifted it to me saying I had to make him nutritious meals," Felix laughs lightly and picks up another carrot.

"I wouldn't trust you in the kitchen to make him said 'nutritious meals'" Chan nods along with him. "Cooking definitely isn't my

forte,” he sighs but Felix points to himself and giggles.

“Let’s to it together, then,” he proposes and Chan accepts the offer quickly.

There’s enough ingredients for them to make several meals to feed the eight of them until they’re full and Felix’s heart blooms inside his chest.

This life. A quiet life where they grow older together, raise the children that may come to exist, that’s what Felix can see happening.

He looks up at Chan after the eldest pulls out a dish from the oven and stares. His eyes travel down the smooth curve of his nose, the plush lips that feel even softer than they look, those warm brown eyes that never fail to bring warmth into his heart.

“Can I kiss you?” Felix whispers out, already breathless at the thought of their lips touching again.

Chan turns to face him, his cheeks and ears tinged red. Felix’s heart stutters in his chest. His brown eyes blink and Felix shuffles closer to him.

“I like you,” Felix tells him softly. His own cheeks are hot, the blood warm underneath his skin. “A lot.” He admits.

“My heart,” He lays his hand flat across his chest, reaching for Chan's hand to make it rest against his ribcage where his heart thunders underneath it. Chan gulps and shifts closer to the blonde boy. “I’ve always been a hopeless romantic,” Felix whispers. “And for eight months we’ve gotten to know each other... for eight months I’ve slowly fallen into your orbit,”

Chan sucks in a breath before it shudders out of him. “When you opened up to me that night, my heart made up its mind and now,” his hand raises to stroke at the eldest’s cheek. “I cannot keep it to myself anymore,”

“Then don’t” Chan finally utters out. His voice is so soft and his touch that lands on his shoulders, that creeps up to his neck sends shockwaves of warmth down Felix's spine.

“You feel like what I imagine home to feel like,” Chan whispers back to him and Felix's heart flips in his chest and he can’t help the tiny laugh of joy that escapes his lips.

“And you make me feel like much more than a boy who made the wrong decision,”

Chan's forehead rests against Felix's own and when their lips meet, Felix melts right into his hold, falling further into the shelter that is Chan. His scent overwhelms him, but Felix will never want to change how the smell of petrichor tingles at his nose.

Felix will part the storm that Chan fights each day with the sunshine that he bathes in.

Chan's fingers dig in for purchase at his hips and Felix responds by leaning further into the kiss.

Chan is a storm but Felix is the sun to chase all those grey, drizzly storm clouds away.

→

24. 23→

Jisung sighs softly, his breath steaming against the cool surface of the window in front of him. His fingers brush over the cushioned fabric of the lounge by his bedroom window and he tucks his knees closer to his body, resting his cheek on his knee as he stares up at the starry sky.

The lounge dips slightly and Jisung looks away from the sky to see Minho looking at him with slightly narrowed eyes. He looks deep in thought rather than anything else.

“I like the stars,” Jisung whispers out. Minho hums in response. “They’re pretty,” he comments.

“I do like this room, don’t get me wrong... I’ve never slept on something so comfortable in my entire life, but I can’t help it but miss those nights where we slept underneath the stars,” Minho tucks his own knees to his chest, copying Jisung’s position. The younger looks back out at the stars, eyes shining as he watches them.

“When we were out there, they were always there. It made me feel alive,” he breathes out the words in a soft utter. “Alive because for seven years I never saw the stars and they reminded me that it was over. That I escaped alive and I could live now. I wanted to see them when I was locked up. I always yearned to see them again, count them until I couldn’t stay awake any longer,” he heaves in a breath.

“I had forgotten the way they shone so brightly by themselves, how bright they were when they clustered together,” he blinks and his forehead falls to rest against the glass. Minho sits quietly, looking up

at the stars while Jisung continues to talk. “The stars give me hope,” he then says and Minho stiffens ever so slightly. Jisung doesn’t notice.

“I had hoped to see the stars again one day, and I got to. I got to look up at them every night and I was reminded by them that this was the start of my life. Now I could live instead of scumming to such a painful fate,”

Minho's fingers brush by his knuckles lightly.

“I cannot give up my hope,” he continues on and Minho tears his eyes away from the twinkling stars to look at Jisung instead. “Because hope will be the thing that keeps me going. That will power me on to accomplish these things that I want so desperately,”

Jisung hopes and hopes even after all he’s been through.

Minho feels a knot form in his throat. He had known Jisung was hopeful, even though he tended to be a pessimist. Minho had felt his hope drain from his body long ago but Jisung makes his gut swirl and Minho wants to hope. Hope so bad that whatever Jisung needs hope so badly for works out in the end.

“Jisung is hope and I will not give up on him,”

His previous words ring in his mind and Minho clutches onto them.

“I will hope,” Jisung whispers and Minho can’t help but agree now. He can overcome it, the searing pain that had once taken his hope away. The death of his mother, the realisation that life itself was becoming pointless, the murder of his friends.

Minho can try his best to overcome that if that is what will let him hope again. For Jisung. With Jisung.

→

Jisung shoves his head through the hole in the long-sleeved shirt just as Hyunjin slowly opens the door and pokes his head in.

“Hi,” he waves at him as he stands rather awkwardly in the middle of the room. “Hello,” Jisung greets back.

“I came to check up on you,” Hyunjin tells him and Jisung frowns and as he opens his mouth Hyunjin adds, “as a doctor,” and Jisung shuts his mouth.

"I'm feeling okay," he admits. "I can walk by myself now," he tells him and Hyunjin smiles, seeming happy with the news of progress. "Um... what do you want to know?"

"How the cramping is going and if the bleeding is slowing down, things like that," Jisung grimaces and shifts around on the bed. "It's not slowing yet," he grits out. "And it still hurts quite a bit," Jisung points to the nightstand where the painkillers Hyunjin gave him after Fern left are. He had admitted he had been in quite a lot of pain before but was distracted by his baby to really acknowledge it. That was until she left and the pain was flaring up inside of him. "I might need news one at this rate,"

"It should stop within a few weeks," Hyunjin tells him. "But let me know, yeah?"

Jisung frowns but nods. "Why do these Mydar doctors trust you so much?" He questions and Hyunjin chuckles sheepishly. "I brought my medical license with me... and after saving a haemorrhaging patient that quickly they believed I wasn't some scheming asshole,"

Jisung sighs and slowly pulls himself up.

"You look tired," Hyunjin points out softly. There are bags underneath his eyes, light but visible. "Yeah," Jisung murmurs and he sucks in a deep breath, pausing for a few moments, looking deep in thought.

"I can't stop the nightmares at the moment," he mutters looking up at Hyunjin before his gaze falters.

For the past few nights he had been awoken to Felix's urgent touches, his soft eyes blown wide with worry before they relaxed and brought him into that comforting embrace of his.

“Could you... tell me what they’re about?”

Jisung's hand falls from the door handle. His eyes stay on the ground, however.

“About my baby,” he admits. “Sometimes I dream she didn’t make it... or that she was ripped away from me. Just like those dreams I used to have but instead, it’s her and not some make-believe baby,”

His eyes met his briefly. “I feel stupid... I know she’s not going anywhere and the nurses say she’s healthy for a baby born at her age and how malnourished I am but I just can’t help it,” his bottom lip wobbles and Hyunjin steps closer, pulling him into a gentle embrace as he cries softly.

“Would you like to see her again?” He offers and Jisung nods his head, pulling away from the hug. “Okay,” Hyunjin whispers softly. “Let’s go see her, yeah?” Jisung slips the pink plush toy into his hand from his bedside table and nods.

Seeing her always makes Jisung's heart and mind ease and when his eyes settle on her tiny frame cradled in Minho's larger arms, looking snug as a bug in the little periwinkle blanket Minho and Jisung worked on making together, his heart swells comfortably in his chest.

“You’re always almost with her,” Jisung murmurs as he sits next to him. Minho hands her to him without a word but he smiles down at her. “She’s just too lovely,” Minho replies and she opens her mouth, face pressing against Jisung's chest as soon as he settles her in his hold.

Hyunjin smiles and pokes her cheek gently before announcing his leave, saying Jeongin and Changbin have been bothering him to join in on a sparing round.

The nurse smiles and hands over the bottle to Jisung. “She knows that you’re her daddy,” She coos, watching the baby nuzzle up to him. “Babies can distinguish the scents of both parents,” the nurse tells him and Jisung stares at her for a few seconds before his eyes rest on Minho, confusion clear in them. Minho coughs and shifts around in his chair. Some of the nurses really haven’t caught the gist that Minho isn’t her parent as well.

“She’s putting on weight much better after you started eating more protein. Good job,” she gives Jisung two thumbs up and he grins at her. The baby is almost a week old now and in that short time Jisung had already warmed up to the idea of being able to provide her with nutrition although still hesitant and rather embarrassed about the whole ideal. Felix and Seungmin had talked with him a few times to offer knowledge they learnt and the more that Jisung learns about these things, he seems to accept faster.

He rather's feeding her through a bottle however, still not quite ready to give that small part of his identity or whatever dignity he has left. The nurses are even proud of his progress and Minho's heart swells with pride for him.

“We should put her name on the blanket,” Jisung mentions as she drinks away. Minho looks at him, surprised. “Have you decided on a name for her now?” His eyes shine in anticipation and Jisung giggles at his readiness. “I have,” he sighs out happily.

“Eunbyul,” he utters it out and Minho grins broadly down at the little baby— Eunbyul.

“The stars give me hope,” Jisung murmurs once more. “There is hope in the stars and there is so much hope in her,”

Minho's thumb brushes by her soft cheek and he then looks up at Jisung, smiling fondly. “It’s perfect,” He tells him.

The daughter that he had grown all while sleeping underneath the veil of hopeful stars squirms in his hold, a little hand escaping her swaddle. Minho reaches out for her hand and his grin almost hurts when her tiny fingers wrap around his much larger one.

“Eunbyul,” Minho tries it out and he feels his heart bloom.

→

The lounge room becomes the place where Chan lands most of them

on their asses.

“Oh come on!” Jeongin cries out after being thrown almost halfway across the room. Jisung flinches at the noise just coming back inside their shared home. “You should be going easy on me!” He whines out and Changbin laughs loudly.

“He is going easy on you!” Changbin squawks out and Chan can only nod to Jeongin who then lets out a screech.

“If you guys are going to act like this when my daughter comes home, I’m kicking you all out,” Jisung warns but he can’t fight the smile from his face.

The nurses had informed him today that Eunbyul was allowed to come home with him after she passes her tests in a few weeks. The nurse seemed confident she will pass and Jisung has been a flurry of excitement since.

“Oh! Is she coming home soon?” Jeongin’s eyes sparkle as he asks and Felix zooms over, asking too many questions at once. Felix usually followed Jisung to visit Eunbyul but the boy hadn’t been awake this morning when they went down. Jisung wonders what time Minho had woken to go cuddle with her.

“*She* has a name now,” Jisung tells them slyly as he crosses his arms over his chest. The room erupts in chaos and Minho scoffs at them, holding back both Felix and Jeongin who zoom forwards. They realise their mistake quickly and take a few steps back.

“Eunbyul,” Jisung announces her name loud and clear and pride sweeps across his face when the room erupts in celebration.

Jisung grins, eyes shining underneath the skylight built into the curved ceiling. Minho's breath has been taken away too many times over the eight months he's known Jisung. Overwhelmed with the gleam in his eyes, the plushness of his lips, the tinge of pink that highlights his cheeks. Minho's never seen him smile like this, though. Something so pure, free of that dismal and fiery hatred that usually surrounds him.

He looks carefree. Free from the shackles the government had sealed him in and Minho has never seen him look so... ordinary.

From the boy that had held so much fear in his eyes when Minho had opened that door to the small room, to a boy that could barely stand their presence for more than an hour he now insinuates touch between them, enjoys hours of nothing but laying in someones hold. He thrives on it, needing the touch of someone else when all those emotions he can't quite sort out by himself become a bit too much.

Jisung has grown from a boy they thought would never get over his struggles or accept his life to a boy that's loving in his own special way. A boy that can't do anything but love his daughter that he had feared his whole life.

And here he stands, glowing underneath the natural sunlight, talking animatedly about that tiny girl. Minho hasn't felt pride like this in his life. Not even when Chan had won his first ring fight at the tender age of sixteen nor the tens of matches he went on to win after his first

fight.

Jisung was an ember once and Minho had continued to think he still was but now thinking of everything he has powered through, Minho thinks he needs to rethink that.

The dousing of icy river waters, the constant battle of fatigue, the injuries the pain to the unforgettable time Minho and he had soared through the air only to plummet into more cold water and the night that followed, freezing and chilling to the bone.

Throughout all the challenges of water trying so bad to extinguish that glowing ember, it had grown. So steadily it didn't seem like growth was being made but now standing here after the added pain of burning sunlight, stinging saltwater and the crimson that no one will ever forget Minho finds much more than a single ember trying so hard to keep itself out of the wind, the elements just waiting to douse it.

Jisung is a flame that's growing and stretching. A calming, gentle burn of a flame that reminds Minho of the fires he'd watch in his fireplace on cold winter nights, cuddling up to his mother while she drank a pot of warming tea while his father brought in more wood to feed the flame that kept his family warm.

But Jisung's flame is no where near completion.

The calmness is strange, unsettling almost and Minho burns himself to add something more to it but he stops himself as his fingers reach out because he knows it is crucial to whatever step Jisung is going to

take next.

Minho will not feed the fire himself but be that calm water that heals, soothes those burns that will come with the roaring fire that he knows will come.

Minho watches him now, those few weeks have gone with a flash, as Jisung holds onto Eunbyul who is snug in her purple blanket as her father looks out to the stars again.

“Giving your star her first look at the stars, are we?” Minho slides next to them almost soundlessly. Jisung hums gently, his eyes flickering to his daughters hazel irises back to the stars.

“She’s not falling asleep,” Jisung tells him but there’s no hint of disdain in his voice at all. Rather he sighs, content and brushes his lips over the wispy dark brown hair, breathing in the calming scent of lavender lotion that Minho had traded one of the shop owners for over fixing his broken cooling system. Minho had discovered quite pleasantly that Mydar’s currency wasn’t the only thing they used to buy items. Trade was much more preferred than money around here. It was almost the opposite in Mydar to the Capital in so many ways and Minho finds it almost like a breath of fresh air.

“Have you slept yet at all?” They had been given the luxury of clocks, even, after arriving and Minho didn’t think it would soothe him this much to know what time it actually was when he woke up at some ungodly hour. Jisung had scoffed and called time a ‘useless concept’ but had then explained after he being awoken by Eunbyul one night that he’s never understood time since he had never seen a clock in his life before the facility.

The clock on his bedside table had shown 2:46am when he had been awoken to soft whispers and the coos of Eunbyul.

“A bit,” Jisung replies and lets Minho take her from his hold carefully. Jisung's hands linger on her for a few moments longer before he leans down and kisses her brow bone. “If I feed her she might fall asleep again,”

Minho nods in agreement just as she begins to squirm, a cry eliciting from her little mouth. “And that would be my cue to move,” Jisung hurries out of the room and Minho gently rocks her, his lips pouting at her as she cries.

When Eunbyul had come home three days ago he had opted for the first few shifts of sleeping in the room to help out. Well, he had been the one to the first volunteer before anyone could even say anything. No one challenged him on that either. Minho had been found out long ago about his early morning wakings to sneak out to go visit her. Minho almost visited more than Jisung himself did while she was in the hospital.

Minho just couldn't help but fall in love with the tiny baby. Her lighter coloured eyes but the shape so Jisung, her mouth a similar shape to his. There's so much of him in her but there are the parts of her that are so unfamiliar. Like the lighter shade of her hair, her eyes that had lightened over the few weeks of her life. Jisung's own love for her bleeds out and Minho seeps it in, tightly gripping onto it.

Jisung hasn't said too much about why he's so interested and helpful and Minho's glad because he doesn't know how long he can continue

to hold his tongue around him.

The younger returns with a warm bottle in his hand and Minhø passes her back, watching him as he sits in his own bed, cradling her while she gladly accepts the peace offering of a bottle.

“You can go back to sleep,” Jisung tells him and Minhø slides back into his own bed still warm from his body heat, watching with sagging eyes as Jisung stares down at her.

Domestic bliss fills him up and keeps him warm. Minhø has always had problems sleeping himself. He had been awake too many times during their travels and he had always seemed to wake for the parts where someone wakes, panting. Chan and Jisung were the main culprits of that, but Minhø had soothed Changbin and Hyunjin a few times after they awoke in a frenzy.

Minhø sleeps soundlessly now he even finds it difficult to wake when Eunbyul is screaming to be held or for a bottle whereas Jisung is up in a flash as if he was never sleeping. Minhø knows he is though because those bags under his eyes have faded instead of deepening.

Eunbyul is rather quiet other than the few times during the night and talking to a nurse that had bumped into him while he was bringing the lavender lotion back had laughed and just hold him to wait, whatever that meant. Minhø knew pretty much nothing about babies except for the fact they sleep, eat and poop. A lot. But looking after Eunbyul with Jisung just seemed so natural and almost easy sometimes.

One thing for sure is that all of this is not being kind to Minhø's heart.

The flame and his little star reside in his heart so deeply that Minho knows that he will never find someone who makes him feel his way again.

Jisung has made his mark on him and Minho is a hostage to that splendid flame. All the willpower he had used before to try to tone down Jisung charging into his heart has shifted into willing himself to love him from afar. To be there and support him as much as he possibly could.

Minho can wait.

And as his eyes fall shut just after Jisung settles a sleeping Eunbyul in her bassinet beside him, snuggling back up into his bed, Minho knows if time allowed them he would wait eons for him. He will wait and wait.

Time won't allow them eons, but this life is enough for Minho. Enough to love that burning flame and his twinkling little star that could grow up to a universe of her own.

Minho will wait for the day he can show Jisung his love.

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Notes for the Chapter:

HI!! how is everyone?? the baby has a name!!!!

FINALLY!! i only just realised that it's quite a gap between her being born and getting named SO whoops on my part i guess lol. Someone did comment a while back hoping that her name would be hope or mean hope and it isn't quite that but her name pretty much means star and Jisung correlates that to be hopeful so technically her name does mean hope!

also, next chapter is the last chapter of part two but the change between part two and three isn't like the change between one and two!! things will have changed but it won't really be a dramatic change straight away! I've got to get a wriggle on with writing AHH I've been offered quite a few special things at school that may take quite a bit of my writing time away but i will stick to weekly updates on Sundays no worries!!!

things seem they have slowed down quite a bit and they have and i hope its not boring but dw it'll get exciting again very shortly! also, this chapter was pretty short but the next makes up with it being 7k lol

thank you everyone !! <3333

25. 24→

Felix clutches Jisung's arm as he cries. He's holding onto Eunbyul, tears streaming down his face while she's screaming.

"Here, here I'll hold her for a bit, you go do what you need to do,"

"I can't!" He blubbers out and when Felix reaches for her she screams louder as if she only wants her dad.

A week since she's been home and Jisung's previous thought that she's a calm baby is suddenly shattered by the past three nights where she's done nothing but cry, screaming for something Jisung doesn't know.

Jisung reaches for her again and she quietens to small whimpers, her face nuzzling up against his shirt. "Maybe she's hungry?" Felix suggests but Jisung shakes his head. "I fed her an hour ago, she's not due to feed for at least two more hours,"

Felix blinks and nods and just as she goes quiet again she breaks out all again.

Jisung changes her while he still cries and puts her in something cooler to see if she was too hot. She calms down a bit but still whimpers as Jisung holds her. He tries putting her in her bassinet but she screams the moment he pulls her from his chest.

The door creaks open and Minho walks him, a fist rubbing at his eyes before they squint open and he looks at Jisung with sympathy. Jisung lets out a sob and waddles over to the elder who bundles him up in a hug. Felix shoots him a look and they communicate for a while through looks while both Jisung and Eunbyul slowly calm down.

"I'll swap with Felix," Minho signals for the blonde to leave the room. He pouts but doesn't fight it, both wanting to sleep himself and Minho just seems to calm them both better. "I must have the magic touch," he teases softly.

Felix plants a quick kiss on Jisung's clothed shoulder blade before he slips out of the room.

“Are the walls too thin?” Jisung croaks out and Minhø shakes his head. “I barely could hear her crying but I felt like something was up,” Jisung sniffs and slowly pulls away from Minhø to look down at Eunbyul. He almost sobs again when he finds her now fast asleep.

“That was so painful,” He whines out. “And all I had to do was get you?” Minhø gently takes her and lays her in her bassinet. “I’m sure that wasn’t just it,”

“Maybe. I did change her into something cooler,”

“It is pretty hot at the moment,” Minhø agrees. He flashes Jisung a smile who just sighs back. “Let’s get you back into bed, okay? If she wakes up again I’ll deal with it,” Minhø pulls the covers over his body and Jisung sighs softly, his hand peeking out to land on Eunbyul’s soft belly.

Jisung falls asleep in record speed and Minhø follows him quickly. Eunbyul wakes up three more times before morning but Minhø soothes her quick enough for Jisung to fall asleep almost instantly again.

→

“You know that’s very domestic of you,” Felix chides and Minhø glowers at him over a chicken sandwich. “It’s not a bad thing,” Felix continues on, shoving another spoonful of fruit salad into his mouth. They had both woken early and decided to come to the eating hall instead of waiting for everyone else to wake. Minhø had left after seeing Jisung’s head almost in Eunbyul’s bassinet, his hand still on her little tummy, it rising and falling with her breathing.

“But I honestly hadn’t pegged you as the most domestic or nurturing person around here,”

“Are you calling me a dick, too?”

“What?” Felix scoffs, his mouth full of food. His eyes narrow and he

shakes his head. "No. God, I meant that as a compliment! Who says you're a dick, hey?"

Minho snorts and shoves the last bit of bread into his mouth. "Jisung," He replies muffled by the food but Felix hears it and he can't help but laugh. "Whatever did you do to make him say that?"

Minho's eyes narrow down at him and Felix squirms a bit in his chair. "Yeah, never mind I get it," Felix waves him off quickly.

"Is it even more obvious that I like him now?"

Felix shrugs. "Now that I already know you do, it's hard to say because everything is just so obvious to me... but you did fool me for quite a long time so I don't think so? Why are you so worried, anyway?"

Minho shoves a grape in his mouth. He recalls Hyunjin's face as they stared up at the blue sky and how he had confided in him, telling him that his feeling for Jisung where strong and he didn't know if he could keep it in any longer. A frown appears between his brows. He hadn't talked a whole lot to Hyunjin these days, too caught up in baby bliss and trying his best to help Jisung as much as he possibly could.

He wonders if Hyunjin has said anything to Jisung or if Jisung had noticed and told him off for even thinking he had a chance. Minho sighs and shakes his head. "It's nothing," he replies. Felix purses his lips at him but he lets it go.

A thump on the table alerts them and Kaya slides next to Felix, giving him a smile. "What's up? Hi, Minho," Minho waves at her and she and Felix fall into talk easily. Minho continues to think as he eats the grapes on his plate if Hyunjin had made a move and he tries his best to stop himself from getting riled up from the thought but it makes him mad to even think about that day in the field.

Minho had known then, that his heart had been captured by the very essence of Jisung but he had been stupid, thinking he'd be able to get over it like those silly crushes he had on the girls in his town back when he was young. But Jisung wasn't like those other girls at all.

They were shy, sweet and friendly to him and everyone else. But Jisung would snap, aim to hurt but that wondrous fire and the meek kindness that would seep out of him had him intoxicated with even the tiniest sip.

Minho snaps out of it when his name is called. Kaya is looking at him expectantly. "Huh?" He mumbles, shoving yet another grape into his mouth.

"Kaya is asking how Eunbyul is going? Jisung too?"

"Why can't you answer that?" He challenges back and Felix huffs at him, obviously irked by the sudden flare of his angry tone. "Because you're the one that's with them most of the day. Hello? You're on baby duty at nights, you know the most?"

"Oh, yeah. I guess so... they're doing pretty good," He then answers honestly and the scene of the two of them cuddling this morning pops into his head and his heart flips in his chest, suddenly filling him with more positive feelings. "Eunbyul hasn't slept that great these days but we're getting there. Slowly."

"She screamed all night for three nights," Felix whispers and Minho sighs. "But then Minho came and saved the day. She stopped crying as soon as he hugged her and Ji!"

Kaya raises her eyebrows at him. "Not the dad, huh?"

"I'm not her father," Minho grits out. "That's Jisung and only Jisung," Kaya pouts and rolls her eyes at him. "Excuses," She sings and then stands up. "I saw Changbin and Jeongin go to the gym on my way here." She tells them and then her eyes narrow at Minho. "Maybe someone should go let off some steam?"

"If only that would solve his hostility," Felix sighs and Minho slaps his arm with a glare. Felix throws his hands up, exasperatedly.

Minho had always had troubles with his anger ever since he was young. He had held onto his emotions, not wanting or knowing how to express himself in a way he felt comfortable. They built up and up until Minho was a fuse about to blow up any second.

His father had solved it by giving him jobs to do. Working his body hard so that anger would dissolve while he worked hard, his mindset on something else. He had outlets to go to for alone time which was vital for him to figure out how to solve these issues.

Minho hasn't had much of that lately, something he still needed.

Changbin could always tell when he was about to boil over and ever since the day Minho had broken his nose after he dug his nose too deep into his business they had developed a mutual understanding of each other and Changbin could read Minho's antsy behaviour easily.

"There's no field you can go sit out here unless you go down there," he points to the ground, referring to the earth below Mydar. "So fighting is the next best thing," Minho huffs and straps on the gloves with a shrug. "I've been doing okay lately,"

"You have," Changbin agrees. "But you're getting more hostile each passing day," Changbin admits and Minho sighs. "Sorry," He apologises and Changbin gives him a fond pat on the back.

"I'm a little tired at the moment,"

"Yeah," Changbin nods his head. "Felix and Seungmin have said you taken up 'fatherly duties'..." Changbin pauses briefly and stares up at Minho. A frown appears between his brows then, light but Minho can see it clearly.

"You don't... ah you don't potentially like Jisung. Right?"

Minho grits his teeth together. "No," he ushers out. It hurts him to say it because he knows its the opposite. He's enthralled by Jisung.

"Oh, okay." Changbin shrugs it off and doesn't question him any

further but the look in his eyes is knowing.

“Let’s fight!”

Jisung settles on the curved stairs that curve around the large room, Eunbyul tucked in his arms, sleeping soundly. Seungmin drops the bag next to him and coos at the sleeping baby.

“She sleeps like an angel during the day,” Jisung sighs. “But doesn’t want to sleep when its night,”

“I’m sure she’ll figure it out soon enough,” Seungmin gives him a wave then jumps down the stairs. Jisung watches from afar as Hyunjin signals Seungmin over and begins teaching him the basics of fighting. Chan had told him all four of them were well trained in the arts of fighting and all of them would be good teachers if the rest of them wanted to learn.

Jisung would like to. The sharp and smooth movements that Minho fights with, such a dangerous element in the way it looks like a dance. Hyunjin is well-timed able to read his opponent's next move or maybe he had memorised his friends fighting style. Changbin was quick, nimble and flexible whereas Chan was a force, all strength and rough at the edges.

Jeongin had picked up a lot already in the past few weeks and had this fluidity of him. Jisung felt like a proud mother watching him pick up on different moves.

Seungmin and Felix had only started lessons recently, just before Eunbyul came home but they too are learning fast. Felix is flexible, like Changbin but his movements are strong, mirroring Chan in a way whereas Seungmin was more defensive, something Jisung has noticed Minho excels at too.

“I didn’t think I’d see you here,” A voice muses and Jisung flinches, turning to see Isa settle beside him. She gives him a soft smile.

“Hi,” Jisung blinks at her and mumbles back a greeting.

"I train here with the guards," She tells him and Jisung nods gently. "That's how I met Fern, you know?" She sighs dreamily and smiles when Eunbyul fuses gently, waking from her nap. "I was the head of the guards— I still am, but she was appointed the leader the day we first got to talk. I always liked her. I thought she was pretty since I was a little girl,"

He shifts Eunbyul in his arms and she whines out when he places her against his legs, but calms quickly when he gently rests his hands on her belly.

"I do not see what this has to do with us?"

Isa's eyes twinkle. "Maybe it doesn't," She shrugs. "But stories usually bring people together, no?"

"You want us to get closer?" Jisung asks her, confused as to why she was even talking to him. "Why not?" She replies. "I think you're an interesting person,"

Jisung grimaces lightly. "Not really," he whispers but Isa shakes her head. "Well, if you want to go join them I'd gladly watch over your daughter," Jisung watches her for a few seconds. "I don't think—"

"Of course you do not need to say yes," She chuckles nervously. "I can just see you really want to be down there. I won't leave. I'll stay here. I promise,"

"She gets fussy if she's not with me," Jisung whispers and Isa just smiles. "That means she loves you,"

Jisung blinks at her. Once, twice and the third brings a tear down his cheek. He had known she liked him, but the thought of her loving him back... Jisung's heart has been through a lot during his life but the thought of his baby loving him back... that was enough to bring him to tears, overjoyed in that moment.

"If she gets really fussy I'll just be down there,"

"Of course," Eunbyul had fallen back asleep and when Jisung passes her over to Isa, she barely stirs. He breathes out a heavy breath

before making his way down to his friends.

Chan grins at him when he appears before them and gives him a pair of gloves.

“Bring it on,”

→

Almost two weeks later Jisung is sitting in the eating hall over a plate of eggs when he looks up at Minho.

“Do you remember when you told me what overmorrow means?” Minho blinks and slowly nods. “Of course,” his mouth is dry at the mention of that time. The cold rainy night where Jisung had cried, spoken of how he wished for a better world for his kid— for Eunbyul.

Tomorrow was too near to change it but overmorrow, it was further away. It gave them time. Overmorrow was what Jisung wanted to change.

He had spoken of a revolt, but Minho had forgotten about that quickly in turn for thinking about the mess Jisung was and how hopeless Minho was to him.

“The day after tomorrow, right?” Jisung mutters and Minho nods softly. It confuses him to no end when Jisung suddenly stands, Eunbyul in his grip and wanders out. “I’m going to get ready for bed,” he tells him. “I’m tired.”

“Okay,” Minho croaks out.

He watches him leave and frowns down at his plate. Jisung has been acting different these days and Minho can’t help but think he’s got his

mind on something that Minho doesn't know about.

He had trained with them, leaving Eunbyul in the care of Isa and sometimes Fern who wanders down to see her wife. He had made good progress and Minho can see his potential to be good one day. He would stare out at the window for long periods at a time, in deep thought and he had become restless almost. He was always doing something whether it was making new clothes for Eunbyul or jackets for everyone else when it was easy to get them through trade now.

Chan looked concerned about his behaviour and Minho cannot help but feel uneasy about this if it has Chan worried.

→

When Jisung closes his eyes at night memories of the institution would sweep by his eyelids and he'd wake, gasping. He was remembering everything they had ever done and everything he'd gone through.

He's unsettled and that itch, that craving for the revolution is crawling up his throat, taking over him.

Felix is asleep in the bed next to him. Eunbyul had finally calmed down these past few nights and Jisung was so grateful not only that she had finally settled easier but that Minho had stayed to help the remainder of her fussing.

Jisung can't sleep, however. He's been tossing and turning for what feels hours and Eunbyul had already woken once for a feed.

His gaze turns to the window where he spent hours gazing out at, wondering what else is out there. How disarray was the Capital in now? Jisung craves to know if they're out of their minds looking for them still. He wants to know if they had left a mark with room to add to it.

He swings his legs out of bed suddenly and quietly picks up Eunbyul and creeps out of the door, careful to not wake Felix when the door clicks shut.

Eunbyul coos up at him and Jisung down smiles at her. "Sleep, baby," he whispers kissing her forehead. A few days ago Changbin had come back with a baby sling for Eunbyul to lay in, still close to him but so Jisung's hands were free. His daughter loved it and slept so peacefully whenever she was in it, cocooned like she was in the womb again.

He slips her into and she lets out a satisfied coo at him. He giggles lightly and then heads for the exit of their residence. Fern and Isa had told them they were more than welcome to ask for a bigger place with bigger beds and so Hyunjin and Jeongin didn't have to share every night but they had grown used to this life. It was more comfort than what they had been expecting after months in the wilderness and staying together was important to them all.

Jisung quietly treads down the halls of Mydar, coming across the occasional guard that would question him but he'd quickly answer he was in need of new books to read while he feed his baby. They hadn't questioned him further.

He was going to find books, that wasn't a lie but his motives were much different than just entertaining himself while his daughter ate. Jisung needed knowledge because Chan will not give in yet. He had tried many times lately but Chan had shut him down and tried to distract him instead.

Jisung burns for this. His body feels as if it'll erupt if he doesn't sort this out and if Chan refuses to help him, Jisung will do it himself.

The library is dark when he enters, save the dimly lit candles around the place. The library looks different from the rest of Mydar. It wasn't as bright or as sleek, instead, it was cluttered with shelves of books and trinkets around the place.

"It's quite late for you to be out, Jisung," He jumps, a hand shielding Eunbyul and pressing her closer to him.

“Oh,” he relaxes when he finds Isa smiling at him, her thick black curls bundled up at the top of her head.

“Couldn’t sleep either?” Jisung shakes his head and sighs. “I’ve got a lot on my mind, I guess...”

“Sometimes it is like that. Do you need any recommendations for books? Fern and I have pretty much read the entire library at this point,”

The thought smacks Jisung across the face and it leaves him red in embarrassment. He had forgotten he didn’t even know how to read but some part of his brain had been so impulsive he hadn’t remembered that very important information.

“Uh... well I’m quite interested in history at the moment... just stuff,” he shrugs and Isa hums.

“The history section is always quite full. The people of Mydar are much more interested in the fiction this library has to offer,”

She wanders over to a bookcase, tightening the pale yellow robe around her body as she walks. Jisung follows her, his arms cradling Eunbyul through the sling.

“I know this might be strange to ask...” He starts off quietly and the older woman turns and smiles gently as her hand lands on a book. “Is there any way that books have been recorded? So you can listen to them instead of reading them?”

Isa cocks her head at him and nods. “Of course.”

“It’s just I don’t want to wake Eunbyul or anyone else if I’m going to read at night,”

Isa’s smile broadens. “That’s very considerate. I’ll get you a device for that, just a second,” she leaves him there between the bookcases and he sighs out in relief, peeking down at Eunbyul who stares up at him with wide hazel eyes.

“Daddy forgot something very important,” he tells her and a tiny

smile stretches across his lips. His heart flips in his chest and he laughs. "Pretty girl," her first smile had happened last week in the middle of the night while he feed her. He was talking to her after she finished and she had blossomed into a beautiful smile and Jisung had woken Minho up with his crying. Minho had laughed and his smile had stretched so wide when he had seen her little smile.

"All you have to do is scan the code on the spines of the books and it'll appear on here to read or to listen to!" Isa hands him the device and Jisung thanks her with a smile.

"I'm going to grab a book and then head back to my wife. Get back safely!" He waves goodbye to her and then proceeds to scan the first ten books in the history section. He zooms out quickly, bumping into Isa on the way back. He gives her a peek at Eunbyul who coos at the woman before he zooms back to his bed, quietly slipping in and listening to the first book on a quiet setting.

→

The world beneath is bright. Full of greenery and splashes of colours were flowers bloom even in the heat of Summer.

It's a stark difference from what Jisung remembers his childhood and past years looking like.

Three months have gone by.

Three more months he's watched his daughter grow from a tiny always sleeping baby to a chubbier baby, always happy to see him.

Jisung is glad she was born here in Mydar, where the greenery is accessible and surrounded by people who love her and where she'll never go hungry.

Her childhood will not be anything like his and Jisung is so grateful for that. The sight of her growing so well had soothed that ache in

him, settling him out of that frenzy of thoughts of a revolution. He had still listened to the many books, learnt of past revolutions and marvelled and swallowed bile sometimes from both the power and absolute destruction they could bring.

He had thought over and over again that he should just stay put here in Mydar where his daughter will be able to lead a quiet and comfortable life.

But the nightmares will not leave that easily.

When he forgets about it, leaning towards staying his own mind rebels and fills his dreams with blank white walls, the spillage of red blood and the screams of terror.

Jisung knew there were others there. Most of them younger than himself, some even as young as he had been. And as he lay awake, sometimes feeding his daughter when the night was high, he lets himself cry silently, just hoping those boys to not suffer the same way he had.

His mind had been made up ever since he had jumped over that wall.

Humanity would fall and it will fall at his feet.

That was meant for them. Those despicable humans that brought this heavy weight of trauma upon him. Jisung will not let them get away with it.

His door creaks open and he turns and Minho bounces in, a very happy Eunbyul in his arms.

Jisung smiles and watches him walk up the length of his thin room. Eunbyul spots him and underneath the white towel hood, she beams, fists banging excitedly at the sight of her dad.

Jisung laughs as takes her into his arms, peppering kisses on her face and letting her mouth wetly at his cheek in return.

“She’s always so happy to see you,” Minho strokes her head with a fond smile. “She loves you too,” Jisung tells him and the elder nods.

"I know that. But she's the happiest whenever she sees you," Jisung looks down at his daughter and she coos loudly, smiling.

"You looked like you had a lot to think about when we came in," Minhø murmurs when Jisung wanders to his bed, placing Eunbyul down in the middle. Minhø passes him clothes from her draw and the lavender lotion.

"I guess so," Jisung sighs and Eunbyul squeals when Jisung rubs the soothing lotion over her skin. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Jisung shrugs his shoulders and looks back at him, gently taking the nappy and onesie from Minhø's hold. "It's kind of complicated," another way of saying he's a complete monster that wants destruction.

"I can't argue with that," Minhø shrugs.

"I need to get her bottle from the kitchen," Jisung mutters back and Minhø follows along with them both, making faces at Eunbyul as they wander to the kitchen.

Jisung suddenly halts and Minhø almost crashes against his back.

Minhø peeks over his shoulder and his jaw drops. Jisung gasps and the couple at the kitchen counter separate, cheeks flushed red and lips swollen.

"Excuse me!" Jisung shouts out. Eunbyul lets out a displeased sound and Minhø can't help but smile at her before frowning at his own friend.

"So you get a boyfriend and you don't even tell me? I thought we were best friends!"

Felix coughs out and Chan takes a hesitant step backwards. "We didn't think... that it was that important?"

"You're kidding me," Minhø drawls out, his eyes narrowed. Chan starches at his neck and chuckles nervously. "Well, you know... Eunbyul and everything..."

"Hey," Jisung breathes out. "You help me out a lot," His eyes stay on

Felix. "I know I can count on you to talk to... do you feel the same? Is it because I don't understand a lot yet?"

Felix's eyes widen and he shakes his hands at him. "No! Of course not!" He clears his throat and steps away from Chan making his way over to Jisung. "I just didn't want to disrupt what you had going on," Felix's gaze flickers to Minho and his eyes narrow. Minho's cheeks flush a bit and Chan's eyes widen comically from where he stands. Minho gestures to him that they'll be talking about this sometime later.

"Lix... you can trust me to talk to as well,"

"I know, I know," Felix sighs. "But I wasn't sure how you'd take it all... I'm really sorry! I won't keep anything from you from now on!" Felix's eyes are glazed over lightly and full of sincerity. "I was never mad at you, I just wanted to let you know,"

Felix freezes for a split second before a grin eats its way across his face. He shares a quick look with Minho before bundling him up in a gentle hug, mindful of Eunbyul lying in his arms.

Jisung had grown a lot within these past months. The training, parenthood and the conversations he'd share with his new friend Isa had impacted him very positively. Minho has noticed lots of improvement in his sympathy and empathy. Minho will never stop being proud of Jisung.

Jisung laughs softly and pulls back, giving his friend a soft smile.

"No more babies," he whispers and Felix throws his head back and laughs. His eyes twinkle and he hums at him, reaching down to kiss Eunbyul's forehead. "Not yet at least,"

Minho quickly warms up Eunbyul's bottle and then they're wandering out the door, to the large gym branch where the others are training together.

Minho joins them as soon as they enter. He bids bye to Eunbyul with a quick squish of her chubby cheeks and Jisung quickly spots Fern reading a book while Isa is releasing her wrath on her guards. Jisung

head to the leader who waves at Eunbyul when she peers up from her book.

“Oh, she’s getting so big now,”

Jisung usually would pass Eunbyul off to Isa if she was available or take her down in the sling she still fit into. His training was beginning to show and Chan and Changbin have told him that its rather impressing itself that he’s learnt this quickly, especially after only having a baby not that long ago.

But this time, he stays and allows Fern to talk to him, ask about how Eunbyul is and how he likes it at Mydar so far. He’s honest and tells her he enjoys it and wishes he could stay. Fern smiles at that. Jisung tells her how he’s glad Eunbyul was born here and has the chance to see the beauty of the world here in Mydar.

“I’ve been wanting to ask for a little bit now...” She pauses briefly. “I just didn’t know how to bring it up, honestly... but the council and I, we’d like to invite you eight— nine,” she adds on after Eunbyul coos. “to join us at dinner soon,”

“Oh,” Says Jisung, surprised. Fern gazes at him, her green eyes full of what he believes to be hesitation. “Why ask me and not Chan? He’s kind of taken the leader role over us?”

“You’re the one whose’s story everyone is the most interested in,” Fern tells him softly. “You’re the one who almost gave birth in the elevator,” Jisung winces at the memory and clutches Eunbyul tighter just the slightest bit.

“I’m sure we can make it,” Jisung tells her and the smiles she gives him is relieved.

→

Everyone had been shocked when Jisung told them the details of the invitation. They knew Jisung had gotten close to Isa but Fern was

different.

They had accepted after talking about it as a family and Jisung had handed the invite back to Isa, promising to be there.

The day has come and Felix had fiddled with Hyunjin the past three days to get suitable clothing for such an occasion. Jisung was still trying to keep out of Hyunjin's way. He still respected him, nothing had changed in that regard but Jisung was desperate when he was in labour and Hyunjin was known to him. It was different now.

He couldn't stand to be with him alone, remembering how the plush pads of his lips would press against his own. Jisung avoided him mostly and Felix had noticed, of course.

He had tried to get it out of him but Jisung had nothing to say, even when Felix asked if he was the one that made Hyunjin so upset that day where he had broken down in the forest. Jisung doesn't have the heart to admit that he had caused Hyunjin so much pain.

Jisung sighs and lets out a soft coo when Eunbyul whines at him. "I'll hold you soon, daddy needs his nice clothes too," She doesn't look happy with him but Jisung can only giggle at her little pout.

He finishes buttoning up the silky blue shirt and reaches for her. Minho had been ecstatic when he came back from his usual trade route of repairs with the yellow dress in his hands. It was pretty much a perfect fit and the colour made the flecks of yellow in her irises stand out.

The shoulder of his shirt slips a bit and Jisung sighs but leaves it be. He had put on weight finally and he felt much healthier than he ever has but still had more to go to be deemed healthy. The gap between his thighs had narrowed down and he had been self-conscious of that at first, knowing the shape of them had been altered by the artificial hormones they'd pumped him with but he'd quickly forgotten over the fact that Eunbyul had started putting more weight on after he had as well. The nurses claimed it was because his body was able to keep up with the demand easier now with the changes.

Jisung steps out to see Chan and Felix eyeing each other and Hyunjin

comes out and slaps Chan cross the head. “Cut it out, lover boy, we’ve got places to be!”

Felix rolls his eyes at him and gives Chan a hug, relaxing in his hold. The rest of them had found out about them the same day Minho and Jisung did because Minho had ‘accidentally’ mentioned it.

Jisung doesn’t think he quite believes that it was an accident.

Changbin runs out of his shared room with Seungmin, the latter following in tow with a belt. “Your pants might fall down at dinner!” Seungmin whines and Changbin shakes his head. “Not if I eat enough!”

“Eunbyul!” Jeongin thuds on over, his white shirt shines slightly under the light. “She looks so cute,” he cos out. He then looks at Jisung and gives him a thumbs up. “Looking good,” he smiles and nudges him with his hip.

“You think? These pants feel a bit tight around my hips...” Jeongin shrugs and then leans in and whispers. “Minho hasn’t been able to stop looking at you,”

Only then does Jisung notice Minho across the room. His dark green shirt is tucked into his black pants and he leans against the wall, his eyes glued to him. He only breaks away his gaze when Jisung looks at him and he quickly makes himself busy by fiddling with the ribbon in Hyunjin's long hair.

“We should get going,” Chan then says, breaking Seungmin and Changbin out of their bantering and Hyunjin from slapping Minho for ruining his hair.

Minho sucks in a deep breath and falls into pace with Jisung. “Eunbyul looks sleepy,” he comments and Jisung hums. “I fed her before I changed. She’ll probably fall asleep when we’re eating,”

“You look nice,” Minho then tumbles out and his ears burn hot after he registers what he’s just said. Jisung gives him an eye down and

then smiles. "Not looking too bad yourself," Minho would melt if they weren't on their way to what sounded like an important dinner.

Seungmin settles beside them and coos at the tired baby. "She's so cute," he sighs out and Jisung hums in agreement. "Not so cute when she wakes up every twenty minutes for the past two nights,"

Minho's eyebrows raise at him. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Jisung blinks at him. "She doesn't cry, she just wakes and wants to be held most of the time. There's no point for anyone to be there when she's just wanting comfort,"

The halls of Mydar begin to change. Photographs line the walls, of a man and family portraits. They walk past a portrait of Fern and then one of her and Isa together before they stop at a door.

The guard that had escorted them presses the button to the door and speaks through the microphone, announcing who he had with him. A click sounds and then the doors are parting, sliding apart for them to walk into the leader's branch.

Fern and Isa are waiting for them there, looking graceful in floor-length dresses of similar colours of yellow. Isa smiles at Jisung. The other council members are behind them, staring at them with interest.

"Welcome!" Fern begins with a smile. "We are very pleased to be holding this dinner with you all,"

"As are we," Seungmin smiles. "The dining room is this way, please follow me," Fern gestures with her hand to the left and begins to walk away. Isa waits a few seconds behind her wife, getting into step with Jisung.

"Don't you just look dashing," Jisung huffs and smiles softly. "I wasn't really expecting such a formal occasion,"

"Fern likes to impress," Isa mentions. "I find it rather amusing as well,"

"I've never been to a dinner before," Jisung admits. "I think I'll be

easy to impress,” she gives him a sly smile and then gestures to the table in front of them. She gives him a wink. “Enjoy,” She whispers and then saunters away to her wife.

The eight of them pause for a little bit until Hyunjin takes a step forward, his hand gripping the back of the chair and sliding it out. They follow after that, gathering to take seats closer to one another than to near the council members. Jisung gets a seat near Fern and Felix. Minho sits across from him, Chan next to him.

The food is unlike Jisung has ever had and Felix seems to think the same way with how he keeps shooting him glances every time he takes a bite. It’s rather endearing, Jisung thinks.

He had originally thought it would be more... prying but they talk about how Mydar is going, how they all like it but then the questions of the Capital start squeezing in. Like ‘how did the disease come to be?’ They had all answered the same. ‘I don’t know,’

They had eased up a bit, asked about how it was compared to Mydar. Eunbyul had fallen asleep before they began eating and woke, wanting another bottle so Felix and Seungmin had volunteered to go back and feed and bathe her.

The questions slowly got heavier.

‘How did the government prevent the disease?’ Jisung didn’t know. Neither did anyone else. He shares a worried look with Hyunjin over that.

“What about the government? How is that run?”

“Why is everyone so hung up about the Capital?” Jisung suddenly stands and frowns at them. “We came here to escape to you really think we’d like to talk about it?”

Fern blinks at him, slightly deflating in her chair.

“I apologise...” She whispers. “I was simply curious... even though we do not have contact with others much, I am trying to know what I can.”

Jisung sighs and settles back in his seat.

“The dinner was really great,” Chan pipes up. “But it’s getting late now, perhaps we should head back? Again, thank you so much for your hospitality,”

“Of course,” Isa replies sweetly.

“Go back safely. Thank you for coming,”

They make it to the doors before Jisung stops. “Go ahead without me. I want to talk to them for a bit,” Minho cocks his head at him, goes to open his mouth to probably ask if he should stay but Jisung shakes his head before he can even offer.

“I shouldn’t be too far behind,” Minho’s eyes ease and he nods softly. “I’ll keep the lights on for you,” Jisung gives him a gentle smile in return.

Both Isa and Fern seem surprised to see Jisung again. The council members have disappeared as well and Jisung is thankful.

“Are you concerned that they’re going to come here?” He spits it out and the women share weary glances.

“Jisung...” Isa starts but he shakes his head. “I don’t believe they will, but I cannot know for sure. I was just a dumb boy when I lived there,”

Fern blinks at him and then briskly walks for the window, shutting it.

“I have come to tell you my story,” Jisung breathes out heavily. “The real one without any gaps or cover-ups. Everything,”

Isa lets out a heavy breath. “But why?” Her eyes are soft, warm, motherly almost and Jisung wishes that he had that for longer. That his own mother had loved him enough to keep him safe from the prying hands of the government.

“Because I want something and you both will not understand why I

want it so much unless you hear my story from the first to now. I trust you both enough for you to understand where I am coming from,”

Jisung speaks.

He starts from the start. His life in the slums, tells them all about how his parents sold him. He goes through everything they did to him. He tells them of the first baby he had lost and he had cried once more. Isa's arms were warm, like how he remembered his mothers to be.

He hadn't missed anything. He had spoken about the implantations and how Minho had burst through his door. Their journey, his pregnancy how it had weighed him down without them realising he was even pregnant.

And when he finishes the women have shed tears, overwhelmed with how much he has been through in nineteen years of life.

Jisung's lip wobbles but he catches it between his teeth.

“So I want to change the world,” He whispers. “I want to free the other boys, to save them from the same fate I suffered.” He takes in a greedy gulp of air and looks up at both taller women.

“I want to lead a revolution,”

Fern's eyes widen a fraction and Isa takes a shocked step backwards. A shuddering breath leaves Fern and she gives him a nod.

“I want to tear them apart,”

“You have come to me for guidance in this?” Jisung gives her a firm nod and a smile stretches across her lips.

“You cannot possibly lead a revolt with just Mydar's forces,” she looks to Isa and the woman laughs. “It seems there is another journey ahead of you. Finding allies.”



Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone!!! BIGGER CHAPTER AAAAHH sorry this was a few hours late, i had a picnic dinner with my family which was really refreshing btw LMAo

so this week was horrible. and i honestly wasn't sure i would be able to write this week but writing gives me serotonin and i took that hit lol. i really enjoy writing this fic and i enjoy posting it more to share it with u guys!! everyone's comments make my week so much better but where have u all gone LMAO

i was worried it was getting boring and not as many people were reading ahh I'm INSECURE IM SORRY i hope you guys are doing well!!

and this is the end of the second part!! if anyone is confused, it doesn't mean much at all dw but it just kind of signals the end of an arc and the beginning of something big ;) if u guys cant tell WERE GOING ON ANOTHER ADVENTURE!!! I'm am so excited... and how are u guys going with the slow burn? Personally, I'm so excited for the satisfaction in the end but i know ppl might feel different! also I'm rambling bc i just wanna talk to you guys lmao i love u and ur comments sometimes bring tears to my eyes!!! MWAH

i hope everyone has a good week!! see you soon!!!
<333333

Notes for the Chapter:

hi for a little warning there's a description of a panic attack in the first bit of this chapter !

Jisung shakes as he walks down the halls. His fists are balled up tightly and his fingernails dig into his skin painfully, almost enough to break the delicate skin.

There's a persistent trembling of his body, so deep that it almost hurts and it almost numbs his brain of what had just happened.

He just wants to get back in, hope one of his friends is still awake so he can run into their embrace and hope this painful tremor disappears with the warmth of their body against his.

He doesn't know what had really just happened. He knows he had told the two women about what he had been through, but he hadn't thought revising over it like this would be enough to make his heart beat so fast it feels like its creeping up his throat. His body aches with the trembling and he gasps out for air.

Jisung hasn't felt like this in a long time.

His breath leaves him and his knees fail. He tries to steady himself on the side of the wall but his bones feel almost chalky and he crumbles.

The weight on his chest is full, suffocating like he's drowning in the sea again, but this time there's no saltwater that escapes into his nasal cavity, it's the memories that weigh down on his chest, blocking him from air.

Jisung collapses down, his body hitting the floor with a thump. He braces himself with his hands, eyes blown wide in panic.

"Jisung!" He doesn't look up, too drowned to realise his friend is right there.

Seungmin's face blurs when he comes into his line of vision. His hands are heavy on his shoulders, warm and weight that suddenly reminds him that he's safe right here on the ground. He takes a shuddering breath when Seungmin thrusts him to his chest, those weighted hands patting down on his back.

"Let's get you back home, hey?" He gently whispers to him.

The jitters don't stop when they get back or when Seungmin gets him a drink of water. They're consistent and an ache begins to seep into his bones from them.

His clothes are suddenly too tight and he tugs at the collar of his shirt, no where near his throat but it feels as if it's choking him anyway. He claws at it and Seungmin's quick fingers unbutton them until the fabric falls off his shoulders. The cool air hits his sweaty skin and he breathes in deeper.

“Good thing I went to find you when I did,” Seungmin murmurs to him. He brushes hair from his eyes and gives his shoulder a squeeze.

“Do you want to have a shower? Cool down a bit?” Jisung nods this time and Seungmin follows him to his room. In his daze of panic, Jisung still turns back, alarmed when he doesn’t find Eunbyul in her bassinet beside his bed. “It’s okay,” Seungmin gently tells him. “Felix has her. I can go get her while you shower or should I leave her with him tonight?”

“She’s mine,” Jisung croaks out weakly. “She’s my responsibility,” A small smile stretches over Seungmin’s mouth. “Do you not remember when we made that little pact? We said we’d take care of her too,”

Jisung's eyes flicker around the room.

“Go have a shower,” Seungmin pats him on his arm. “I’ll be right here,”

The cool water runs over his body and the chill of his bones had eased away into a subtle ache. Seungmin hadn’t asked why he came back so late. He had to guess it was at least two hours he had stayed back going over just how his life had gone for the past eight years now.

He’s exhausted, he then realises when he remembers he needs to get out of the shower and sleep so Seungmin isn’t up all night, either.

They had listened to him though. Isa had gone pale and had to brace herself on a chair before they all decided to sit down instead. Jisung was glad, his own legs weren't going to hold himself up much longer anyway.

He had thought he was a little bit sinister for wanting such destruction on the Capital and he had tried to reason it out, by giving them details of his stay in the facility. He had told them things that even some of his friends didn't know. Like him being seventeen, so young and grieving over the loss of something he had never wanted. And they had understood. Perfectly.

Fern was always rather distant, maybe a little hard to read herself and spent hours and hours thinking what was the best decision for Mydar as a whole but she had decided then pretty much that Mydar would be a part of what Jisung wanted, but they weren't enough for such things.

With a shuddering breath, Jisung brings himself up on shaky legs and dries himself off and pulls out a shirt that's too big on him but reminds him of their journey when none of the clothes had really fit him, always being too big until his middle had stretched out with Eunbyul safely sheltered inside.

Seungmin is asleep in the bed opposite his when Jisung patters out of the bathroom, but surprisingly Minho is standing in the open doorway, a whimpering Eunbyul in his arms, pressed against his bare chest.

"I thought Felix had her?"

“He did,” Minho whispers as he steps in. “But she was crying and those two are such heavy sleepers all of a sudden,” Jisung snuffles a small laugh. “Hyunjin has always slept like a rock,”

“Damn right,” Minho passes the baby to Jisung. “Are you okay?” His fingers linger on the bare skin on his arm and Jisung sighs and shrugs.

“I’m exhausted,” Jisung admits softly but smiles down at Eunbyul when she settles down in his hold. “Go back to bed,” Jisung gives him a nudge to the doorway. “I’ll be fine,”

When Minho leaves— a little reluctant— Jisung settles in his bed and watches his daughter. Her wide hazel eyes gaze at him as they slowly begin to flutter shut and once she’s asleep, Jisung slowly pulls back his hand from her tummy and when the first tear slides from the corner of his eye, Jisung cannot find it in him to stop them from rolling down his face.

→

Jisung wakes late to the sound of Eunbyul’s whines turning into cries. Seungmin has already left, probably to let him sleep in but he had left his little alarm behind to wake him anyway.

Jisung smiles down softly at her and slides out of bed, reaching for

her.

His eyes are probably puffy because when he exits his room, Chan's eyes are on him and they soften at the edges with worry.

He doesn't say anything and walks ahead to the kitchen, preparing a bottle for Eunbyul.

"Jisung," He turns at Chan's voice and tries to give him a smile. "Hi, Chan, I'm just getting her bottle so we can talk after that, yeah?"

"Oh, sure..." He leans against the kitchen counter, watching as Jisung manoeuvres around the kitchen, from the fridge pulling out a bag filled of milk and then a bottle from the bench. "I can hold her while you get it ready?"

Jisung smiles at him and passes her off. She fusses and shoves a fist into her mouth while she whines.

"You came back late," is what Chan says first when Jisung takes her back and guides the bottle to her mouth. "I didn't think you were awake?"

"Seungmin told me. And Minho woke me up when he came back in,"

"Oh..."

“What happened? You don’t look very... okay right now,”

Jisung peers down at Eunbyul who’s eating away, but her eyelids are swooping again. She had probably awoken quite a bit before Jisung and just laid there quietly before she decided she was hungry.

“I was talking to Fern and Isa,” Chan sighs and looks around the kitchen before shuffling closer.

“About what?” Jisung gives him a small glare, but it softens when he finds the worry glazed over in Chan's eyes. Chan was always one to worry about them all but the gentle lines of his face always makes Jisung want to bury himself in that safe petrichor scent and tell him everything.

“I told them,” Is all Jisung says before he breaks again. He sobs out and the tears come before he can even feel his eyes filling up with tears. Chan's brows tight upwards and he looks almost close to tears himself.

Eunbyul halts her drinking and gazes up at her dad who racks with sobs. Chan takes her from his arms, tucking her safely in one and he holds Jisung close with the other.

“Jisung,” He breathes out.

“I told them everything,” he whispers to him and Chan's grip around him tightens. He pulls back to gaze into his eyes. He finds them full of despair, anxiety and Chan lets out a soft whimper himself.

Chan's eyes widen a fraction and he lets out a shuddering breath.

He had always feared this time. When Jisung would finally awaken and realise though he was one, all it took to start a revolution was one person. The power of men would come from there but in the beginning, it was only one person who took that step, so desperate or so sick and tired of everything.

Jisung was all of those things.

Chan wasn't stupid. These past weeks he had been different, in deep thought and preoccupied with other things all of a sudden.

“You told them about what... you want? That revolution?”

“Of course I did,” Jisung hisses out. He hasn't lost that fierceness to him and something inside Chan eases. “If I were going to tell them everything I wasn't just going to tell them for the hell of it. I needed them to understand why I want this. Why I need it,”

Chan peers at him with anxious eyes.

“Do you want this too?” Jisung gazes up at him and his eyes glisten

with his tears and in those dark irises Chan finds something akin to defeat but something sinister is there. Chan shivers.

Jisung had once hummed a song around a campfire one night. Chan had heard it clearly. The tune that he'd remembered a little boy humming along to just the day before Chan had witnessed his fall.

He had been so carefree, happy that day and the tune was mellow. It had stayed in his mind for years and that time Chan had heard Jisung hum it around the campfire, he had realised this was the boy he watched fighting hopelessly in the men's arms.

Jisung had once been a happy kid, well as happy as a kid could get in the times they lived but it was a stark difference to what would come from him. It was almost ironic.

Chan had never been able to forget how Jisung was taken. The look on his face was nothing but pure panic when his father had left his line of vision.

Jisung was Chan's own awakening and those eyes, big and wide, now shining with tears like they did almost eight years ago— those feelings Chan had felt when he saw Jisung that day fill him up again.

He knew what had gone down in there, not like how Jisung knew of it but Hyunjin had shook talking about just some of the things and Jisung's eyes had changed so much. They had killed all that light in them and they were nothing of what they used to be.

The look in his eyes in the early days of their travels had been nothing short of terrifying.

There's clarity in them now and they shine brighter, dim but it is there that spark and Chan wants to cradle that, allow it to grow and grow until Chan can do nothing but just watch as he reclaims those fires that were always his.

So he answers, in a strong voice that then sends Jisung into another wave of sobs.

"Of course I do,"

"Good," Jisung chokes out. "Because if you said you didn't I was going to go by myself,"

Chan's heart clenches because he doesn't truly know if Jisung is lying or not. They only had each other, the eight of them, now nine with the baby cradled in his arm but was Jisung willing to leave this behind?

Chan might not be able to ever know what truly happened in there for Jisung to be so desperate, but he will not fight it anymore. Because Jisung could give up everything he had for this.

Chan thinks he's a little insane but that might just be what they need.



Fern stares at them in her doorway. Her own eyes looked tired and bags hang underneath her eyes, telling she didn't get much sleep last night either.

"I wasn't expecting you to come back so quickly," She whispers out but gestures for the both of them to come in. "Nor was I expecting just two of you to come,"

"The others don't know yet," Chan mutters out and Fern's brows raise. Her eyes fly to Jisung who just nods.

"I wasn't expecting that,"

"Yeah," Chan breathes out. "I wasn't expecting it either when I figured out what he had decided on,"

"Definitely not a light or an easy task... but that is why you both are here, I'm assuming?" They nod and she takes them to the lounge where Isa is, petting a grey cat. She gives them both small smiles.

"We kind of just left it out there last night... we do have questions,"

"And we will try our best to answer them," Fern replies and gives them an honest smile.

They answer all their questions the best they possibly can. Mydar was built after a revolution and Isa grabs the copies of the files on it and passes it to Chan who thanks her. They learn why most settlements decided on no communication between one another, trying to avoid a war like the last that had destroyed most of the world.

But they were up to helping with this because there were signs that the Capital were doing much more than just taking young boys and destroying their lives. Chan spoke about the constant murders, the shutdown of some areas of the slums. Something didn't quite add up but there wasn't any other way to get information from the Capital besides what they knew.

Until Isa brings up the team of scouts that had been to some settlements on this continent.

"I thought you banned that?" Fern shrugs. "We've had a few people come from a nearby settlement, we just decided to take a look at it to see what was going on. Trading and things were really the things the previous leaders were trying to demolish."

The talk of finding allies comes up and it's quiet for some time until Fern suggests that they talk to those few families before they leave Mydar.

Mydar would support them as much as they needed, Isa would prepare the guards and the other special divisions in Mydar for this. But the Capital was much bigger. It was cities, slums the size of cities themselves. The government wasn't just a few people in office but built up by the wealthy class. Doctors and scientists that ruled the era of the mutations.

When night falls they have gone over enough to begin planning out their next journey rather shortly.

Jisung knows he has to bring it up somehow.

Isa gives Jisung a small hug when they go to leave. "If you have any other questions you know where to find me,"

Chan stares at him when they stand outside the door of their home.

"We have to tell them,"

"And how easy do you think that's going to be?" Jisung frowns at him and Chan groans. "Maybe we should've gone there as a group?"

Jisung hangs his head low and Chan sighs.

"We have to talk about this... we can't just say 'hey we're going on another crazy journey be ready' this is different than just running away from the Capital... if someone doesn't want to go we can't make them go..."

"Are you worried that we're all not going to be going?"

"I think that's something worth being upset over," Jisung mumbles. "But I already said that if no one wants to go I'm going by myself,"

“And what? Travel out there to different settlements all by yourself? You could get killed!”

“That's not what I mean and you know it,” Jisung grits out at him and Chan groans. “I will find a way to bring it up, but for now we just need to... calm ourselves down,” Jisung presses the buttons to the door, the scanner recognising his fingerprint and he storms into the lounge room where Changbin and Minho are laying on the ground where Eunbyul is kicking her legs between them, laughing with those soft baby laughs that leaves Jisung's heart a mess.

“Oh, you guys are back! We didn't know where you both went,” Jeongin slides over to them and gives smiles.

Jisung freezes and swallows hard. “I'm going to just take a minute,” He mumbles and hurries off to his room.

“What's up with him?” Changbin asks and Jeongin shrugs. “You were out pretty much all day,” Minho reasons. “He's probably really tired now,”

“If I'll say,” Chan mumbles under his breath.

“Where's Felix?” He asks the three who simultaneously point towards the kitchen. Chan flinches at the synchronisation and hurries to the kitchen where Felix and Hyunjin are chatting softly.

“Are you coming out for dinner?” Jeongin pokes his head in the room and his brows knit together when he sees Jisung crumbled on the floor in front of his dresser.

“Ji?” He turns his head towards him and tries to flash him a smile. The light is dim but Jeongin can just make out the lines of his face and the tired look in his eyes.

“Dinner is ready,” He whispers out softly and he watches carefully as Jisung gazes down and then hauls himself up. “Sorry,” he apologises when he passes him out of the doorway. “I was just... a little overwhelmed with everything...” Jeongin offers him his hand and Jisung smiles and this time it’s a little brighter, almost relieved.

“You don’t have to apologise for that,” Jeongin tells him gently. “We all understand,”

Sometimes Jisung cannot comprehend how lucky he was to have the friends that he does. How they were all so supportive and loved each other. Jisung was lucky enough to be here right now but to have friends that did their all to make sure everyone was doing okay. That’s a little overwhelming itself.

Everyone is sat around the table when they enter. He gives them all a tiny grin before his eyes flicker to Minhø who is holding Eunbyul in one arm while he eats with the other. The seat next to him is free and he squeezes himself into it, giving Hyunjin a reassuring hum when he gazes up at him, looking a little worried.

“I’ve missed her,” Jisung sighs out as Eunbyul yawns softly and snuggles into the warmth of Minhø’s chest. The days were getting cooler now on the verge of Autumn fading into the bitter cold winter

days that had first nipped them in the bud during the first month or so of their journey to Mydar. "I'd say she's missed you too," Changbin speaks up, a glass of water in one hand.

"She was a bit upset today. She was only happy if Minho held her," Changbin lets out a small laugh. "It seems like someone has chosen her favourites already,"

Jisung pouts at him. "If you guys swarmed her like Minho I'm sure she's content with you," Felix clears his throat and raises his brows as he takes a sip from his glass. "Not too sure about that one," He murmurs and his eyes flicker to Minho. Jisung looks towards the elder and is rather surprised to see his eyes narrowed into a glare at Felix. His jaw is clenched and Felix shifts around in his seat a little uncomfortable from the coldness of his stare.

"Sorry," he mutters out and the table falls into silence as they eat. Jisung reaches for Eunbyul as she begins stirring in Minho's hold and as soon as she gets in his arms she gives in to sleep, warm and safe in his arms.

"You know it's been a whole year," Changbin says suddenly and everyone looks over at him. He grins broadly. "Since we broke you guys out,"

Jisung sinks back into his chair and breathes out heavily. A whole year of being free and yet everything is about to change again.

"That's crazy," Jeongin murmurs lowly. "I can't believe time flies past that fast when you're not locked up,"

“I’ll say,” Jisung breathes out a little disoriented.

“But hey, where did the both of you go today?” Seungmin then asks Chan and Jisung.

Jisung shoots Chan a look. The eldest holds it and his gaze turns pleading almost. Jisung feet shuffle on his floor beneath them and purses his lips, just about to shake his head but he turns his head to look at his friends.

He could lose them. Some of them mightn’t want anything to do with what he wants. Jisung’s heart contorts in his chest and he gives into it.

He’d rather burn than be put out.

“We were talking to Fern and Isa,” he finally lets out. There isn’t much of a reaction, they seem to accept it pretty well.

Because they didn’t know what they had been talking about. They didn’t know that it was a revolution they spoke about.

He squeezes his eyes shut and holds his daughter closer to his chest. When he heaves in a deep breath and opens his eyes, their expressions have changed. Expectant almost, wondering.

“I told them everything last night,” Jisung mutters out. “Everything,”

It feels almost as time has stopped. Utter silence. Jisung feels like he might drown again until a warm hand falls to his thigh. He locks eyes with Minho and he sucks in a deep breath.

“But why...” Felix murmurs out and he looks slightly horrified. He knew. He was one of the only ones to truly know what just terrors Jisung had gone through. “Because...” Jisung's voice trails off, falling just above a whisper.

“Everyone chooses their own path, right?” His eyes trail down Eunbyul's profile, the slope of her little nose and her lips parted with tiny breaths. It warms his heart at the sight of her but she, the tiny innocent baby that loves him so much is the result of seven years of hell. It wasn't her fault but there she was, living proof that those seven years weren't just a fragment of his imagination.

Hyunjin shifts in his seat next to him.

“I'm not staying in Mydar,”

There's silence for a few seconds until the soft clatter of a glass being placed down fills the still air. “Why?” Felix's voice is soft, sad in a way and Jisung looks at him, his brows furrowed and he just knows he can see the tears welling in his eyes.

“I decided long ago that I would go back. To the Capital—“ there's a gasp from someone. Jisung doesn't look around to see who it was from. “To ruin it like it ruined us and all those other boys. Those people that were murdered... I cannot live here in peace knowing

there are boys going through what I had to... what we went through. That pain of growing that organ, of everything else they had done to us. It's not fair,"

Chan intervenes quickly. "I'm going with him." He announces and Felix turns to him, eyes wide and face contorted in shock and Jisung sees horror in his eyes.

"We were organising a revolution, something akin to one anyway." He breathes out deeply. They continue to stare in horror, in shock. They let them. "I cannot sit around either. I remember everything. To Jisung getting taken," Felix reaches out and grabs at his wrist at that. They didn't know that Chan had seen as much as he did. "From our friend's execution, their murders in the fucking street," his fists tense. Hyunjin, Changbin and Minho tense too and the hand Minho had on Jisung's thigh clenches and he pulls it away suddenly.

Jisung craves the warmth and the weight to return.

"I will ruin them," Jisung whispers gently under his breath and it sends chilled waves down Chan's spine again at the calmness in his tone.

The sound of a chair squealing as it grates across the tiles startles Eunbyul and she wakes with a cry.

Hyunjin peers down at Jisung, his eyes narrowed and his jaw clenched. "Is this what you meant by our paths being different?" His voice grinds down at him and Jisung is suddenly back in that forest, Hyunjin touching him and begging for him to not go. He remembers

the look in his eyes and the touch of his lips against his own.

“That was one of the reasons,” Jisung whispers and he flinches back when the glass in his hand is thrown down, smashing to bits beneath them.

“Hyunjin!” Chan shouts but the taller doesn’t budge, still fuming.

“You,” he shudders out and shakes his head at him. Jisung's heart trembles in his chest. “I can’t believe you,”

“Haven’t you already said that before?” Jisung hisses out to him and in one quick movement, Hyunjin is gone out of the doors.

Felix shakily gets out of his chair then and Jisung looks towards him, panicked because it’s Felix, his best friend. The first person he had put trust in again.

“I can’t,” he croaks out and a tear rolls down the curve of his cheek. His grip on Chan's wrist weakens until it slips out. “I just wanted a quiet life, Jisung... I wanted to be safe. A home... a family. Not a revolution...”

“I’m not telling you that you have to come with us,” Jisung mutters and Felix nods. “I know...”

Jisung stands then too and gently passes the fussing baby in his hold to Minhoo who stands with him. Jisung wanders over to Felix and bundles him up in a hug. He releases then, pulling back and brushing blonde hair from his friend's eyes.

“The night I found out I was pregnant,” his gaze flickers to his daughter in Minho's hold. “Minho taught me a word. Overmorrow. The day after tomorrow. I will fight and fight for that. Because tomorrow will be no different to today but overmorrow, we can change this. I want to change the world because it is broken and it has done nothing but hurt everyone in it. The Capital will suffer in turn for those people that might wish for an overmorrow that is safe. I want a better overmorrow for us. For my daughters and any other children, we may bring into the world,” Because Jisung knows that Felix wants that. That had been the reason he had entered, not expecting such harshness but he had been a young boy that had a simple wish for his future.

Minho had told him that because he had seemed lost in that moment. But he had spoken so soulfully about what he had hoped for and a little bit in Minho then had been so enthralled with him already and he wanted to give him something to hold on to.

When he had smiled, the gleam of his teary eyes and those pink lips lifting, Minho had been breathless and now it hits him that Minho had a lot to do with this. But he's not mad, not upset, not even shocked he's just left breathless once more. Jisung is so unpredictable but it's that fire in him that fights to never go out that is pulling him underneath that intoxication of him.

Minho is in awe once more. Not because of his smile this time but because he had not only kept this in for so long but he had figured out he could do this after hearing just one word.

Felix grips onto his hands and gives him a nod.

“We are family,” He whispers out. “And you mean so much to me,” Felix lets out a small cry. “It isn’t fair... them being in our positions but we got out. They don’t have their own little group to bust them out so we should go back and get them out, save them while they still have that hope left,”

Jisung's eyes twinkle under the artificial light. “I did just want a quiet life... maybe that was selfish of me but I cannot stand here and say you’re insane or that you’re wrong or I won’t go with you because we are family and that part of me that hurts... I want to come too,”

Felix locks eyes with Seungmin and then Jeongin. “We’re going to lead a revolt! Who’s coming with us?”

And slowly they all stand, gathering around the force that had been brave enough to realise his power.

A smile curves onto Jisung's lips and he lets out a choked sob. They had been so sure that he would rage one day, brighter than those white-hot flames and this is it, the next step to that glorious burning.

Jisung burns brighter.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HELLO !! i am so excited for this part... its definitely
my favourite IM GONNA SCREAM IM SO EXCITED
WTF

anyways!! id, like to say a big thank you to everyone who leaves comments seriously even the smallest comments, bring a smile to my face :DD it feels very rewarding and i just love u all <3333

Jisung definitely does make a few whacky decisions still but he's maturing pretty darn quick so i guess this is like a little warning for what he ends up choosing in the next couple of chapters. hes trying very hard!! I'd like to say minsung are getting there but Jisung's so oblivious still... i love him still tho its okay

they all have such good bonds already but there's definitely even more room for them to grow!! and that will all come with time!

i cannot wait to introduce more settings to this story i hope u guys r excited too!! until next week! Stay safe and have a good week!!! <33333

Hyunjin feels lost.

He hadn't meant to get that mad at Jisung but he had overwhelmed with emotion in that moment. He knows that wasn't just why Jisung had decided to choose to end whatever they had going on, but it had stung nonetheless to know that's what he had meant when he had talked about paths.

He's a little ashamed, honestly. He had never really gotten over him he was still hung up over him, and sometimes he would catch himself remembering their kisses and how soft his lips were, how his smaller body had felt underneath his hands but it would make him even more ashamed to know that Jisung was just confused and he was desperately trying to fill his life up with those seven years he had lost.

They had played each other, pretty much and as much as it still stings Hyunjin finds it a little bit humorous. It was a little bit of comfort during a trivial time and Hyunjin is thankful they had what they had but his heart just won't let go of Jisung that easily.

"I thought you might've come here," Jeongin slips next to him and smiles at him. "How did you know?" Hyunjin mumbles back and the youngest shrugs. "I saw you head this way a few times. I didn't know you enjoyed the gardens?" Hyunjin shrugs. "The colours of the flowers are nice," he says in a sigh. Jeongin hums and shuffles closer to him. His head rests against his shoulder and he hums out in content.

“You know everyone's a little scared that you're not coming with us,” he mentions gently and Hyunjin tries to peer down at him.

“Has everyone decided to go?”

“Yeah. Even Felix.” Jeongin moves and looks into his eyes. “You know you have a choice, right?”

“I know,” Hyunjin stares out at the array of colourful flowers. “I just was a little upset with a few things before...”

“So... does that mean you'll come too?” Hyunjin chuckles at the younger's persistence.

“Yeah,” he breathes out. “Of course I'm coming,”

→

A revolt.

It's been something he's wanted for the past year and now that it is near, not just a mere thought anymore Jisung cannot help the apprehension spread through his body.

There were so many things they had to go over. How would they

travel? How long would this take? Jisung has so many questions. He frets about Eunbyul too. The nurses said she was too young to stay away from him and she didn't do well on any other milk they had tried.

Jisung never wanted her to get tangled in this but they mightn't have a choice at this rate. He looks down at his daughter and sighs loudly. Changbin shuffles closer to him on the lounge and chuckles lightly at the sight of her jutted out lips.

"What's got you thinking so hard?"

"Everything," Jisung sighs. "If this all works out... we have to leave soon," Changbin nods along with him. "I don't want to take Eunbyul along with us but I think that's the only option,"

Felix perks up from the other side of the room. "Didn't you mention that Fern and Isa said there were people from the nearest settlement? What if we talked to them to see how they might react?"

"I guess," Jisung shrugs. "I'm not just worried about them being hostile on our arrival... just how are we going to get by and such. They might really not enjoy our presence,"

"But that's a risk you're willing to take, right?"

"I wouldn't have had the balls to speak about this if I weren't one hundred per cent sure I was going ahead with this," Felix claps his

hands. “Well, we have our answer. Let’s go find them and sus them out!”

Changbin chuckles lightly at him. “For someone who was extremely adamant at first over this, you sure aren’t acting like it now,”

Felix laughs and gives a soft nod. “Maybe I woke up a little bit?”

Jisung gives his head a soft shake and reaches out for Felix's hand after putting Eunbyul in the sling. “Let's go, yeah?”

→

Fern and Isa tell them they all live in the farming branch in Mydar. They hadn’t ventured there very often—Minho usually went to fetch their produce due to his background in crops, but Changbin had gone with him a few times so he leads them there without a hassle.

There are two families from the settlement they learn is called Sunsen and they were easier to find than they thought. The bright yellow tags hanging from their ears were signs of their heritage and Changbin had spotted them easily.

“Sunsen?” The woman cocks her head to the side and places her basket down. “Why would you want to know about that place?”

The three of them shoot anxious looks together. “We’re leaving on a mission soon. Confidential.” Changbin says as firm as he can. The woman’s mouth opens but she nods slowly.

“So... why do you want to know about it?”

“We just want to know if they’re a welcoming settlement or if we should expect something more...”

The woman eyes the baby cradled in the sling and her eyes met Jisung’s. “Because you’re taking a baby?”

Felix’s mouth drops slightly. “She’s good...” he whispers to Jisung.

“It’s not a hostile settlement,” she nods her head. “Not much electricity... they’re nice. We moved away because my daughter fell ill and the medical care wasn’t as good as what it is in Mydar. We’ve only stayed because we like it here and it’s convenient for us as a family. If you’re taking that baby they will be unharmed. My people are friendly and kind.” She gives them a shrug. “That is all I can really say, I think,”

“Oh,” Jisung clears his throat. “Thank you, anyways. That gives me some peace,” She offers him a bright smile. “Safe travels!”

Outside the doors to the branch the three of them pause and Jisung breathes out. "I'm going to see Fern again, I'll be back for dinner. Don't wait for us!"

Felix and Changbin give him a wave and then he's off, zooming towards Fern's office.

"You certainly aren't afraid of barging in anymore," She sighs as he comes through the doors, unannounced. She's sat at her desk in front of a pile of papers. If Jisung knew how to read he'd probably be dreading sorting them all out.

"Sorry, I should've knocked at least," Fern motions for him to take a seat in the chairs in the corner of the room. She rises and heads over herself. "I needed a break anyway. There's only so much documents you can read before you begin to hate everyone who's put a paper forth," Jisung winces. "You don't happen to have paperwork on our next journey?" Fern waves him off. "Only a bit," She smiles. "That part is fine,"

"I'm guessing you've talked to them?" Jisung hums and Fern reaches out and touches Eunbyul's hand that's escaped her little sling. "Made up your decision?"

"There wasn't much of one to begin with," Jisung sighs loudly. "I didn't have much of a choice either way but she said they're friendly... It's just the unknown that kind of scares me..."

Ferns eyes flicker down and she stands again. "I have a few things I wanted to give you. I thought it might help with interacting with some settlements and hopefully maybe connecting them? I'll just be a moment,"

She comes back holding a box while giving him a soft grin. "These are devices we use for communication when there's lots of distance between us," she passes him it. It's rather small, only the size of his palm and it weighs little to none. There's a screen in the middle of it with several different coloured buttons surrounding the edges of that screen. "I think we used something similar to this when they were breaking us out,"

"Probably," Fern slides the box over to his lap. Jisung peers in it and finds a larger device, not by much but it catches his attention nonetheless. "What's this?" He picks it up and Fern chuckles.

"I prepared it the night you told us," her smile is melancholic. "If you pull out the spring there," she points to the engraved surface and Jisung's thumb runs across it, feeling the grooves and indentations. "It might help you guys out if you run into trouble on your journey,"

Jisung drops it back down and gives her a nod. "I hope you all stay safe," she whispers. "You all have grown on me. I wish to see you all again after your journey,"

"Of course you will," Jisung swallows. "We are the ones who escaped an abusive government and spend eight months on their feet just to get here,"

Fern's hand lifts and lands on his cheek, soft and warm. Her skin is smooth over his own and Jisung softly leans into that touch as her thumb brushes gently across his long eyelashes.

"I wish you well, Jisung." Her smile is fond and shows care in her eyes. Jisung feels as if he's ten all over again, sitting in his mother's lap as her hands stroked his face. He blinks and nods once.

"Thank you," Fern can only sigh as the warmth of her hand retracts and some part of Jisung, the part that had been torn away from his mother too early aches and that part of him wishes he could curl into her embrace and seek that motherly comfort once more.

But Jisung stands, tucks a hand underneath his daughter's bottom and gives her a bow. She breathes out heavily and when he looks back up her eyes are shining.

→

"Oh god!" Jisung barely ducks the swinging arm as soon as he enters the room. He covers Eunbyul with his arms and ducks, swinging on his heels to avoid Jeongin's fist.

"Hey!" He glares at the youngest who is now still, his mouth wide open. "Why are you fighting in here anyway? Go to the gym you almost knocked my goddamn lights out!"

“Sorry!” Jeongin runs and tugs at his arm. “Hyunjin told me I wasn’t putting enough power in my attacks. But, hey you’re a good dodger,”

“Thanks,” Jisung’s brows knot at Hyunjin. “You’re both good. Jeongin, you’ll probably be able to get Hyunjin on his ass soon,”

“I’m planning on it!” Jeongin gives him a thumbs up.

“We were cleaning up,” Hyunjin butts in, ignoring the youngest. “Minho just organised getting a ship with Isa,” Jisung’s eyes widen a fraction.

“This journey is going to be so different from our last one. First of all, we don’t have to walk everywhere and I think that is the biggest blessing. Sometimes I think my feet are still aching,”

“God,” Jisung breathes out. “Tell me about it. I thought my feet were going to fall off so many times they hurt that bad,”

“Well, that’s great!” Jeongin clasps his hands together and then cocks his head to Jisung. “And this way you’re not going to have another drowning scare,”

“You did have a few of those,” Hyunjin agrees and Jisung flips him off. “And may I remind you all that those three times were not my fault!” Jeongin shrugs. “Well, it’s going to be easier in its own way. Now we have to get all our shit together and get it on the ship soon,”

Something buzzes through Jisung's body, like excitement but it's underlined with the uncomfortable buzz of anxiety. It was mere days ago when they had all decided to go on this journey together and it feels so strange to have thought about this for so long, keeping it hidden for the plans to be made to them leaving soon.

"Where's the ship?" Jisung questions. "How are we going to get all our stuff there?"

"You're acting as if we have a lot of stuff," Jeongin deadpans. Hyunjin nudges his shoulder with his elbow. "Eunbyul definitely has more stuff than all of us probably do,"

"That's an exaggeration!" But even Hyunjin looks hesitant. "Okay, fine. But she's a baby, she needs a lot of stuff,"

"Then let's hurry and pack most of it up. We should leave as soon as we possibly can, right?"

"I guess so," Jisung mumbles. "Is everyone else preparing the ship?" Hyunjin nods softly. "Minho's making sure with the mechanic's team that it's all good. Knowing him he'll memorise all its parts and shit so if anything does go wrong he'll know what to do,"

"What a well-rounded group we have," Jeongin sighs. "A baby and a genius," Jisung pouts at him and Hyunjin grits his teeth. "I think you left out a few of us?"

“No, I don’t think so?”

“Next time you break your arm, you’re on your own,”

Jisung shakes his head at the two and retreats to his room where he stares at the mess of sheets and baby clothes dumped on his bed while Felix sorts through everything.

“It looks like something exploded in here,” Jisung mutters and carefully takes Eunbyul from her sling to her bassinet.

“I guess they told you about the ship?” Felix’s eyes glisten as he looks at Jisung. He joins him in folding out her clothes, leaving the smaller sizes behind in favour for the larger fitting ones. “They did,”

“It’s pretty amazing,” Felix murmurs. “I don’t think we had ships like this back in the Capital,”

“Minho and Hyunjin have both said Mydar is more advanced in technology than what they recall the Capital to be,”

“Talking about Hyunjin, I do hope they’re both packing up the kitchen like I asked them to,” Felix grumbles and Jisung laughs.

→

Jisung has dreamed of this moment for almost a whole year.

Mydar was kind to them. They flourished here under the care of Fern and Isa. Jisung wouldn't ever be grateful for that. Even after coming in and causing an uproar by their entrance, they had been looked after closely by the two leaders.

He'd miss the comfort of Mydar. The morning light that would fill his room and wake Eunbyul and him from their slumber. He would miss the quiet mornings of cuddling with her in bed, caressing her soft cheeks without a care in the world. It was time for them to heal from their past adventure, from their lives that took too much from them.

But now they're leaving again.

They're leaving this comfort, this safe haven for bigger things, better things. Jisung can't give up on this. He will not give up on those other boys in the Capital or the too many innocent citizens that had been murdered for no reason.

There's a small buzz inside of him when he looks up at the ship that will take them around the world. It's sleek and unlike Jisung has ever seen before. Large enough to house them all comfortably, with enough rooms some people will be able to have their own space.

Minho had spent two days with the mechanics to learn how the aircraft worked and then one more for him to look it over himself. Those three days Jisung had organised with everyone else to get the ship liveable and say their goodbyes to the people they grew to know in Mydar. No one had asked to come with them, but they had wished them well and hoped they'd be successful in their efforts.

It's unknown whether this will even be successful. It could collapse and they'd wander back, unable to do anything for the people left behind. Jisung will do everything he possibly can to make sure he doesn't come back empty handed. This is worth fighting over.

Fern's fingers brush over Eunbyul's cheek. She's awake, pressed against Jisung's chest in her sling, looking around everything with those big eyes of hers. Isa's hand cups her head and rubs her thumb over her brows. The babe's eyes flutter, the touch soothing her into sleep.

"Remember," Fern hands Jisung something and she tightens her hand around his as he clutches it. "If you are ever in need of our assistance, call us from here. We will always answer, no matter what time,"

Felix thanks her and she offers a smile, soft and small.

Chan's arm slips around Felix's waist and he pulls him closer, knowing the telling signs that he's getting emotional. Isa beams at them and Chan chuckles lightly. Jisung takes a step back. The cooling air ruffles his clothing and his hair. He covers Eunbyul with his arms, shielding her from the cold air.

He feels Changbin's hand steady his back and Jeongin leans closer to him. "We will be back," Chan smiles and something in Fern's eyes flicker. Something doubtful, worried. Her eyes land on him and Jisung can only nod, feeling his throat constrict a bit. Fern then smiles, giving them a soft nod.

“Well, another journey awaits you all. May the skies be clear and the air guide you back home,”

When Jisung turns and enters the ship, it finally sinks in. There is danger in this, and with his daughter pressed to his chest, Jisung cannot help but feel sick with the possibility he mightn’t be able to keep her safe.

The rumbling beneath his feet startles him at first and then the small buzzing of the engines beneath them as the lift in the air brings his heart lurching in his chest.

The doors shut, Fern and Isa’s melancholy faces disappearing from sight.

And then, they’re soaring away from Mydar, the great tree they’d spent several safe and comfortable months in.

But Jisung can’t wait for this new chapter of their lives. The beginning to tearing down the every thing that had ruined them all.

→

Yang Jeongin didn’t live in the slums of the Capital, but he didn’t live inside its walls either. He had come from an entire different region of

the Capital than what Minho and Chan had. It was always full of those white armoured guards, pointing guns at people sometimes for just looking at them.

His childhood was filled with fear of those men. Scared of the people sitting in power in the highest tower in the Capital.

Jeongin disliked them at a young age, always wondering just why they were so bad, and unkind to everyone. His young mind was not deep enough to comprehend it all.

The disease had killed his aunties, his cousins and his eldest sister. His family had mourned for months over all their losses and Jeongin had become hardened to the thought of death. It was still unpleasant but Jeongin had seen it enough, known the aftermath of it too well for a kid his age.

His mother lived, only saved by the fact that Jeongin's youngest sister had been a difficult birth which resulted in a hysterectomy shortly after. His sister hadn't survived but his mother was alive and safe from the disease that plagued the others in the Capital.

Jeongin only had his family growing up. The streets weren't safe and playing with other children spread the disease and before that, those men in white had ordered them home, intimidating them all with those bulky white guns.

His parents had been hopeful people, never giving up on their family and when the notice had come, they had looked at both their sons. Jeongin's older brother was just too old for the age range the facility

had wanted.

Jeongin hadn't wanted to go at first. He didn't want to leave his family but the idea had grown on him.

He had always been read those books about heroes when it was bedtime, or when it was too rainy for them to work on their land.

Jeongin had wanted to be a hero. So he had entered.

But what he got instead was far from becoming a hero.

Those shielded horrors had burned in deep and Jeongin had given up on being a hero years ago, just two whole years after entering Jeongin had regretted his whole life up to that point. Four years he had been there. Just over two years he had been locked up and that had almost broken him as a person. How Jisung had spent seven years like that— Jeongin doesn't know how he even breathes.

The Capital wouldn't know what will hit them. And Jeongin will be right there, at the front lines with Jisung as they stormed back in, once boys who were controlled by the government to young men that would bring them their demise.

"I want to talk to you," Jeongin mutters after pulling Jisung away from both him and Minho bathing Eunbyul. The shorter boy tilts his

head, his brows furrowing gently.

“I want to know,” he grips onto his hand his thumb dragging over his still damp skin. “About what you really want to do to the Capital,”

Jisung’s breathing is shaky and Jeongin’s grip in his hand tightens slightly, his thumb digging in slightly against the delicate skin.

“I’m going to ruin them,” he whispers and Jeongin nods.

“When we came to Mydar,” he starts. “You said you wanted destruction... when you were fading you said that and nothing else,”

“They destroyed us,” Jisung replies in a cold tone. Jeongin agrees with a nod. “But I’m going back and they’re going to regret everything they’ve done to me. To us,”

Jisung pulls his hand from his grasp and the corners of his mouth lift, not into a soft smile that had become common these days, but something that makes Jeongin’s stomach flip.

“Some people might us me mad,” he gives him a shrug of his shoulders and the grin stretches across his face.

“Then they’ll have to call us both mad,” Jeongin gives him his answer and something heavy that Jisung has realised resides in his chest lifts.

Jisung's hands land on the younger's shoulders and laughs. "You'll tear them down with me?"

"Of course I will," Jeongin replies with a grin. "They will regret that they had ever set eyes on us,"

It feels good to talk about what he truly wanted for them. A revolution was one thing but the complete demolition Jisung wishes upon them was a whole other thing. Those damned scientists, the doctors the fucking government.

They will not see it coming and Jisung will burn so bright they can only watch, hopeless and enchanted by his wrath.

Minho's eyes flicker up at him and he smiles, before his eyes land back on Eunbyul splashing her legs in the bath.

"She'll cry if you get her out," Jisung warns and Minho giggles and nods his head. "Every time without fail," Jisung reaches over and pokes her cheeks.

"I'll go get her towel and her clothes," Jisung stands from his squat and Minho hums, gently splashing warm water over her.

The night was falling on them quickly and in the ship, so close to the

sky and so far from the ground, Jisung swears the stars shine brighter from up here. His bare feet pad across the cold flooring as he wanders into the room he claimed for himself and Eunbyul. Her bassinet is fitted next to his bed, which is larger than the previous bed in Mydar. They had given Jisung this room to offer him time to be alone, and the big bed was if he did decide he wanted someone still. He had gotten used to Eunbyul's routine and didn't need much help in the nights anymore but he flourished in the close company of others.

"Jisung," Hyunjin's voice causes him to flinch, startled by the sudden noise. He turns, Eunbyul's longer green pyjamas in his hands.

He stares down at him, eyes glistening in the light from both the lights on the exterior of the ship and the soft moonlight. "Oh, hi," Jisung gives him a soft wave. "I was just getting Eunbyul's pyjamas," he goes to leave the room, wanting to hurry back to his baby and deal with dressing her instead of Minho having to deal with her screaming.

But Hyunjin's fingers land on his shoulder, lightly as if he was scared to put a finger on him. Jisung turns, eyebrows raised at him. Hyunjin slowly pulls him back in and clicks the door shut.

"Now that we know of each other's paths," Hyunjin sucks in a breath and Jisung stiffens. "I just wanted to say if you wanted to try... I... I would always say yes,"

Jisung's brows furrow and he glares up at him. "Are you kidding me?" He hisses out and Hyunjin frowns back at him.

"What...?"

“Hyunjin,” he sighs out loudly. “I ended it because I didn’t feel the same way you felt for me. I didn’t want to lead you on anymore,”

Hyunjin's jaw clenches. “When I said I won’t ever stop loving you I had hoped I was wrong,” Hyunjin breaths out but he then shakes his head. “But that was so useless... you’re too... you. I cannot help myself but just want you again,”

Jisung blinks, trying to calm himself a bit with a few breaths.

“You never had me,” he tells him. “What we had,” he sucks in a deep breath. “Was us young and trying to fill a void. I was pregnant and scared and it gave me some comfort while it lasted, but Hyunjin... you can’t look at me in the eyes and tell me what we had was healthy,”

“But it was good,” Hyunjin whispers, his eyes rake over his face and Jisung's suddenly reminded of how his larger hands felt on his body, how his lips moulded against his. “Maybe,” Jisung mutters back.

“I trust you. I really do,” Hyunjin's gaze falls. “I do,” he reaches out to touch his hand. “I know you do,”

“Good,” Jisung replies. He does trust him. A lot actually. He had trusted him enough to allow him to help him deliver Eunbyul and that said a lot.

“You will find someone,” he tells him and Hyunjin's brows furrow again. “No one like you,”

“And maybe that will be the good thing we’re both hoping for?” Hyunjin purses his lips. “You said that my face reminded you of that place...”

Jisung smiles sadly. “You know how much I love Eunbyul?” Hyunjin chuckles weakly and he sniffs as he nods his head. “I think even a blind rat would be able to tell,” Jisung laughs a bit at that.

“She reminds me of those times. Of every single thing I suffered through to get her. But I still look at her and cannot feel anything but love for her,”

“Are you saying I have a chance?” Hyunjin replies, hopeful.

Jisung shakes his head slowly. “I’m just saying that we can overcome these things. I said I wanted to at least be your friend. We are friends and I don’t want to change that,”

Hyunjin sighs loudly but his eyes land on his face again. “I dream some times,” he begins softly. “That was back at that beach hut, you’re close to me, enough so that I could feel Eunbyul’s movements and I’d wake up in a sweat, knowing that it was that night. As peaceful as it was and beautiful as it was, that was the night I ruined everything? Wasn’t it?”

“It scared me,” Jisung admits softly. He knows exactly what he was talking about. The first night on this land, the saltwater still dampened his hair and Eunbyul stretched out inside of him, the night

where Hyunjin had been so gentle, his kisses warm and soft against his cool skin. But then Hyunjin had spoken those three words.

“I’m sorry,” Hyunjin whispers back and Jisung almost feels like he can smell the sweet smelling nectar that floated in the air again.

“We can’t go back to how things were then,” Jisung finishes softly. “This is a new time in our lives and I’m sorry because I know it hurts you but I can’t let you think that maybe things could change,”

Hyunjin breathes out shakily but he nods, softly and Jisung is afraid that he’s going to cry.

“I need to go to Eunbyul,” Jisung whispers and he opens the door.

He jumps back when he does when he finds Minho there, holding onto Eunbyul who’s asleep on his shoulder, wrapped in her fluffy towel. But that isn’t what surprises Jisung, but it’s the look of rage that burns deep in Minho’s dark irises that causes his heart rate to pick up.

Jisung freezes, suddenly frightened of that unhidden rage.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone!! i almost forgot to update today bc I've just been so sad lol anyways!! we are getting places!! i know the story is moving pretty slow right now but

i promise it begins to pick up at the next chapter!!
thank you guys for all the nice things u say about my
fic they truly make me feel so fluttery AAA

ALSO I've never said this but this fic is pretty much
unedited so the mistakes... the spelling errors etc...
I'm sorry i cant fucking spell in the first place
anyway AKJSDBJ

have a lovely week!!! see u guys next week when
Minho loses his shit and a much needed talked goes
down :PPPPP 💖

[if u wanna say hi here's my twt!](#)

28. 27→

Notes for the Chapter:

THREE YEARS WITH SKZ <3

to celebrate a little have an extra chapter!! i love u all so much

also peep my overmorrow writing playlist if anyone is interested lol [playlist here](#)

Minho passes Eunbyul to him and doesn't give him another look, instead, his burning gaze locks on Hyunjin and he quietly shuts the door.

Jisung flees for Felix's room, nervous as to why Minho looked ready to rip Hyunjin to pieces.

"Hey," Hyunjin takes a step backwards as Minho enters.

"What's going on?" Minho scoffs at him and Hyunjin raises his brows, confused. Then his face falls as it washes over him. Hyunjin smiles awkwardly, hoping Minho would soften at that but he only grits his teeth at him.

"How could you?" He whispers out. It's quiet and low in his throat. Hyunjin takes another step backwards, his eyes widening the slightest bit.

Minho had heard everything. He had come after Eunbyul had begun

falling asleep in the bath and to see what was stalling the young dad. He hadn't expected to come and find something that hurt him so deeply. Hyunjin had said before he liked Jisung.

Minho knew that. Almost as long as he'd liked Jisung he's known that but to find out that Hyunjin had acted on that... and all while Jisung was so unstable.

The first time Hyunjin had spoken of his feelings for Jisung he had felt like he was being dosed out with icy cold water. Instead, now, it feels as if he's filling up with boiling water, steam wafting from his fingertips as he boils over.

"He wasn't ready for that back then," Minho grits out and Hyunjin frowns. "Are you saying he is now? Why are you so upset over it?"

"Because I care about him," Minho hisses out. "How could you come back in here and ask him that? If he ended it the way he did, why did you even think you had a chance?" Hyunjin goes silent as he stares at him. "We were all hurting," Hyunjin tells him. "And I didn't think straight,"

"But now you can," Minho hisses out.

"You like him too?" Hyunjin finally spits back out and he watches with widening eyes as Minho freezes for a split second before he balls his fists tightly. "You do," he whispers out and Minho wants to yell out that he doesn't, that he doesn't care that Hyunjin likes him but he can't. Because he's hopelessly in love with that flame.

He can't even lie about that.

“So that’s why you care so much,” Hyunjin mutters softly. “Since when?” Minho gulps and he shrugs. “Maybe since the time he cut his hand on the blackberry bush,” Hyunjin’s face falls. “That long... then you liked him when I told you I did,” Hyunjin’s voice drops and he sounds devastated in a way. They had been friends long before Jisung came along and to have such big feeling for the same person wasn’t something they had either expected.

But then again they hadn’t expected any of this either.

“I did,” Minho gulps. “But I’ve never really been good with my own feelings, anyway. I didn’t really notice it until when we caught in the landslide... and then the cave.” Hyunjin lets out a shaky breath.

“I didn’t mean to get with him like that... I wasn’t thinking and he... we used each other for comfort then, to feel something but Jisung didn’t feel the same way I felt for him and he broke it off as soon as we arrived on the new continent,”

“Just,” Minho licks his lips and breathes heavily. “Be mindful of him. He’s doing his best to get through this all... we shouldn’t add more stress onto him,”

“My feelings for him won’t go away,” Hyunjin suddenly growls and that heat returns in Minho. “And do you think mine will either?” He hisses back to him. “It’s been a whole fucking year without me putting my hands on him and asking him to do things with me—“

“You’re making it out to seem like I’m a bad person—“ Minho cuts him off again. “I wasn’t the one that decided to take advantage of a

vulnerable boy that is very clearly traumatised!"

Hyunjin glares at him. "You're getting too hostile over this,"

Minho bangs his fists against his thighs and promptly kicks the dresser. The bang makes Hyunjin jump and he's sure the others have heard it too.

"I don't want to talk about this again," Minho grits out. "But think next time, god darn it. He's not like you or me,"

Minho makes sure to slam the door in his face on the way out.

→

Chan ducks Minho's punch and quickly kicks him rather harshly in the butt. He finally falls to the ground and Chan laughs before helping him up.

"Are you good now?" Minho shrugs his shoulders and shakes his wrists to get rid of tension. "Better," he grumbles out. Chan settles on the lounge in the living quarters where they just sparred after Minho came to him, seething with anger. Chan had been glad to fight it out with him or rather he feared that Minho would rip everyone to shreds with that temper of his if he didn't help him get it out.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Minho peers at him over his shoulder with a small frown. Chan chuckles softly.

“I was told that I should be saying that more often,”

“By Felix?” Minho questions and he’s rather pleased when he spots a faint blush on his best friend’s face. “Yeah,” he hums at him but Minho shakes his head at him.

“I don’t think I’m quite ready to speak about it. Besides, it’s not like we even talk about our problems. We fight and get over it, remember?”

“I’ve been told it’s unhealthy to do that,” Chan shrugs at him. “Definitely,” a new voice joins and Felix drapes himself over Chan, getting comfortable in Chan’s lap. Minho just sighs at them.

“After I finally got Jisung to talk to be when he was feeling upset, we suddenly made great progress together,”

“That we did,” Jisung agrees as he pokes his head around the corner. Minho feels stupid when he awaits him to come plonk himself down in his lap. He’s never done that but Minho wouldn’t argue if he decided he was a nice chair one day.

“Feelings are stupid,” Jisung comments as he sits on the rug in front of the lounge. Seungmin snorts as he comes in with Changbin. “Finally someone else agrees with us, Chan,” Minho scoffs and Felix

reaches over to slap his arm.

“What?” He hisses back at the blonde who rolls his eyes at him.

“What is this?” Changbin then scoffs. “A group therapy session?”

Felix laughs loudly and shakes his head. “Although it’s not a bad idea! Oh! We should do something like that,”

“Felix,” Minho whines out but the blonde slaps him harder to shut him up.

“I think I might scare you all if I bring up my problems,” Jisung comments softly as he tucks his knees to his chest. “Thanks for the offer, though,”

“Everyone is so emotionally closed off...” Seungmin mutters and Felix nods along. “It’s fine,” Felix sighs. “But where’s Hyunjin and Jeongin?”

Seungmin points to their shared room. “Hyunjin is upset,” Minho grumbles beneath his breath. “Jeongin is talking to him.”

“See, talking about our feelings is a good thing!”

Jeongin hadn't excepted this.

Hyunjin had come back to their room, tears brimming in his eyes and his fists so tight his fingernails had almost broken the skin of his palms.

And Jeongin would be lying if he said he didn't have a weak spot for the doctor. He was effortlessly beautiful but he had been drawn in by his tentativeness, how much he cared for everyone.

They sit side by side on Hyunjin's bed, the elders head on his shoulder as he murmurs about what just had gone down with he and Jisung before. Jeongin had no idea they had anything going on, but he wasn't mad because Hyunjin couldn't control that.

Jeongin isn't expecting him to like him back, but it's enough for him to be sitting here with him like this, opening up to each other and offering each other comfort.

The night is long, but they fall asleep in each other's arms quickly, Hyunjin murmuring how he's glad he has him. Jeongin sleeps well that night, tucked close to Hyunjin's chest and his arms around the elder's waist.

→

Two days go by quickly and it feels surreal when Minho tells them in the morning that he could see something in the horizon.

Jisung is a bundle of nerves. His stomach is churning but all he can do is just hope he hasn't made the wrong decision.

Felix shudders next to him and Jisung holds onto Eunbyul tighter as they glance at each other. "I didn't think I'd be so nervous..." Felix whispers and Jisung nods in agreement. Jisung had mixed emotions for a while, mostly because he had to bring Eunbyul along with them.

Even though they had been assured the people of Sunsen were kind and not hostile, it's still an unknown environment.

Jisung's just glad their entrance to Sunsen won't be as dramatic as their arrival to Mydar.

They're prepared for this. At least that's what he tells himself over and over again. That's what Chan tells them when they gather in the living quarters after Minho announces they're going to land.

It was decided before they even boarded the ship that each settlement they reach they'd land away from it, enough so it wouldn't cause alarm but close enough to get to in a days walk. The extra precautions they take could mean for a peaceful arrival which would put them in the settlements good books hopefully.

The ship is small enough and quiet enough to not bring any attention to them— something Fern had seemed very proud over. She was a woman that prided herself on the growing foundation of her settlement.

Chan's eyes flicker over to Jisung as if he's asking him, *are you ready?*

Jisung nods.

Ever since Minho had uttered that word— overmorrow— something in Jisung had flourished and he had nurtured that, grown it over the months, the year. He will not let these sudden nerves get the best of him because people back in the Capital need help and Jisung will never be able to live through this guilt if he doesn't at least try his absolute best to get them out of the tyranny.

“Gather some stuff. Not everything who knows what's going to happen,” Chan announces in a clear voice. He doesn't sound nervous — then again Jisung cannot pinpoint a time where he ever has during their journeys— but Jisung knows better than that. He saw his panicked struck look when he realised this is what Jisung was waiting for, hoping for.

Chan is their rock. Someone who is always there and will never leave them even if they think they are not worthy of such a person.

Minho wanders over to Jisung and takes Eunbyul from his grasp as he pulls her sling around his body. She's grown too large to fit in it like she did months ago, but Minho had helped him figure out how to still use it and have her safely tucked to him.

He slips the baby in who coos when she's close to her dad again. Minho smiles at them both and pats Jisung on the shoulder. Jisung then notices he's wearing the jacket he made for him and he smiles back at him. "Nice jacket," he mutters and the elder chuckles.

"You should get one on yourself. I'm suspecting it is going to be rather cold... judging by the scenery,"

Seungmin comes by then and drapes a jacket over Jisung's shoulders, giving Eunbyul a pat on the head as he smiles down at her.

"Come on," Changbin calls to them and Jisung looks up at Minho who nods his head softly at him. He offers out his hand and Jisung accepts it, his broader palm warming his hand.

Chan pushes the button and the doors open. Cool air brushes by their faces and Jisung quickly zips up his jacket, concealing Eunbyul between his body heat and the insulation of the jacket.

"It's been a while since we've had to walk through a forest," Changbin comments as he jumps down. Jeongin follows him and reaches out a hand for Jisung to take, softening the impact so Eunbyul doesn't get startled.

"It's refreshing," Felix comments. "In a weird way," Chan tugs him close to his side as soon as they land on the ground.

"How are you going to get out?" Hyunjin asks Minho. Seungmin

plonks down next to Jisung, giggling. He slams his palm against the button to shut the doors and then throws himself out of the ship.

“Okay then,” Hyunjin waves him off and Chan snorts at him. “You’ve known him long enough to know how he works,”

“Crazy and impulsive?” Changbin pipes up with a laugh.

“I am not impulsive,” Minho spits out with a glare but even Jisung raises a brow at him. “You threw us off a mountain,”

“We survived! Did we not?” Jisung laughs at him, head tipping back as the sound flows from his lips. And Minho is a fool for that noise, the way his eyes sparkle as he laughs out. As if Minho needed to fall in deeper, god save him.

“Come on,” Seungmin nudges Minho who grumbles under his breath. “If we don’t get moving we might arrive at nightfall and I’m pretty sure that wouldn’t be very good,”

“He’s right,” Changbin smiles almost proudly and Felix gapes at Seungmin after noticing the tips of his ears going red, a telltale sign of embarrassment. Seungmin notices and tears his gaze away. Felix nudges Jisung in the ribs but he frowns at him instead, patting his daughter that Felix had accidentally poked instead.

The air is cold and wet as they walk through the damp forest. Jisung hadn’t thought he would miss walking through the wilderness so much after such a difficult journey but they had spent the majority of their year together walking endlessly.

He had missed the way the cool air entered his lungs and how the tips of his fingers yearned for warmth, how the blood pounded in his ears each step he took.

But when his feet begin to hurt after walking for a few hours Jisung is suddenly reminded why he wanted to forget most of their journey. The air grows cooler and Eunbyul begins to fuss. They stop for around twenty minutes while they warm a bottle in the warm water canister and begin walking again as Jisung feeds her.

The sun reached its peak almost two hours ago and Jisung gets a little antsy that they're not going to make it to the settlement in time but just as he begins to lose hope they'd find it soon, Hyunjin gasps, pointing to the line of clothes strung up near the lake.

And suddenly the landscape changes, the forest thinning out and rivers take its place, winding and stretching far over the place. The land is green and when Jisung squints his eyes, he can see sheep and other cattle grazing on the hilly green patches.

"We have had bad experiences with crossing rivers," Jeongin says as he turns to Jisung who grins sheepishly. "Or just large bodies in general," Seungmin whispers and they all share a wince together, all of them thinking about the boat situation.

"Or maybe we can walk across a bridge," Felix says in a sigh as he points over to their right. Everyone turns and notices the fallen log across a wide river.

“That would’ve been one really tall tree,” Changbin murmurs. “How long do you think that’s been there?” Jisung asks, clearly hesitant. “Who knows?”

“I’ll go first,” Chan says and no one bothers trying to stop him because he’ll always be the first one to test the danger of what they’re going to do. Jisung sometimes wants to knock him over the head and tell him he also matters.

The first step he takes is hesitant and Felix reaches out to grip at Jisung's hand as he steadies himself on the log. They had done things that were a whole lot more dangerous, but it’s still not a welcoming feeling to see one of their own put themselves in a rather tricky situation.

Chan gets to the middle and pushes his foot down against the log, testing how much weight it can bear. It holds it well and Felix finally breathes when Chan's feet are on the shore of the lake. He turns a big smile on his face and gives them a thumbs up.

“One at a time, though!” He calls. “I don’t know how much weight it can really hold,”

Jisung allows Chan to grip him around the waist as soon as he’s close enough to the shore. He breathes out shakily when his feet hit the sand. His hand losses on its tight cradle over Eunbyul’s head and Jeongin welcomes him with a short hug.

“I can see actual bridges now,” Chan tells them. “Just over there,” he points through a gap in the collection of trees and true to his word—and to most of their delight a stone bridge stretches wide over the next river.

“Why is this called Sunsen? It’s all just rivers and shit,” Minho grits out as he gets across.

“I think I can see people!” Jeongin exclaims, pointing to the left of the bridge where the silhouettes of people are buzzing around.

“Civilisation,” Hyunjin cries out and Seungmin pokes him in the ribs and gives him a rather judgemental glare. “Lets hurry please,” Jisung cuts in. “It’s going to get dark in a few hours,”

When they finally cross that bridge, into the territory of a new environment Jisung feels relief at first.

But it doesn’t last long. When people finally notice their presence, they bolt away, some screaming in fear to the group of people in the middle of several buildings, what Jisung presumes are markets.

Jisung would be weary if he were with them, too. They’ve come in wearing sleek black and dark green clothing—from Mydar— in comparison to their dull, rustic clothing that Jisung would expect farmers to wear.

In a flurry of panic, several men rush out, circling them on the edge of the bridge. Jisung watches as one of the men gaze at his chest where Eunbyul's head is resting and before he can hide her in his jacket, there's a hand on his hip, pulling him flush to Minho's chest, cradling her between their bodies.

Chan takes of the weapon belt from his waist and carefully places it on the ground by his feet. He then kicks it away, trying to show they're not a threat. He raises his hands and they all slowly follow, except Minho and Jisung who are holding onto each other instead.

There's a shout and suddenly a tall man with the brightest red hair Jisung has ever seen steps forwards through the crowd of men cornering them.

"What is going on here?" He speaks in a deep baritone with a slight accent. Chan drops his hands and looks up at him. His eyes shine in the afternoon light and Jisung feels like he can breathe a little bit better. They weren't going to hurt them. Or maybe they were just waiting for their leader before they beat them to pulp? Jisung nuzzles closer to Minho.

"We are here in search of allies," Chan tells him, his voice confident. The man cocks his head at him and laughs back at them. His eyes flicker to Jisung and Minho and raises a brow at him. Eunbyul cries out then and Jisung adverts his gaze from the red-haired man to his daughter whining at him.

"Come," he then grunts out suddenly. "The air will grow too cold for a young babe soon,"

They share looks but Chan gives them a soft nod and follows behind the tall man.

“Is she hungry?” Minho whispers to Jisung but he gives his head a soft shake. “I don’t know,” he mutters back and reaches for his hand. “I got scared, maybe she did too?”

“We’ll be okay,” Minho assures him. “Chan will be able to get that guy on his ass if we need to,” he whispers to him and Jisung looks a little horrified at that. Minho’s lips twitch and he leans in— “He did it when he was sixteen, the first time,”

Jisung knew Chan was good. But not that good. And it eases him a little bit to know that if something did go wrong Chan would do anything to get them out without a scratch.

The building the man enters is a welcome warmth when they follow him in. Eunbyul’s whines have quieted down but she still mewls out every now and then, her hands tugging on Jisung’s shirt.

Surprisingly enough, the building is empty, but from the warmth of the room, Jisung can tell someone had just been in here. Probably the man peering down at them.

“We do not take well with visitors,” he begins and Chan chuckles weakly. “Nor do we let just anyone become our allies. And for what,” his eyes narrow down at Jisung who’s trying to soothe Eunbyul. Minho takes a step in front of him, shielding him from his view.

“We can explain—” Changbin whispers and the man cocks a brow at him.

“There’s this place. They call it the Capital—” Chan tries to shoot out but the man interrupts him.

“You do not get to explain until you gain our trust,” he glares at them.

“You are not from Hava?” They blink at him, unsure what to say.

“I... we have not heard of that... sir?” Hyunjin speaks out finally and the man crosses his arms over his chest. “You want us to listen to you? For us to allow to tell us why you want to become allies?” Chan nods with Changbin. He pauses for a few seconds to take in their appearances. He must think they don’t look that threatening because he then speaks, “Then I will let you stay and allow you to try to gain our trust. If you do not have a good reason, go back to where you came from. Otherwise, your offer to become allies lies in how you all act.”

The man narrows his eyes down at them. “I am under the impression you all will need a place to stay while you work,”

Chan's eyes flash and they perk up at him. His hazel eyes narrow back at them. “To gain our trust you must help the settlement, of course. If you cannot carry your weight and help out you will be left outside in the rain for all I care,”

He looks back at Jisung. "However I will not be that ruthless to a baby," Jisung stiffens at his words and hides behind Minhø, his forehead reaching down to touch his shoulder blade.

"Then," he grits out. "I will show you to the inn. I expect you to be in the fields tomorrow. Sunrise sharp."

→

Notes for the Chapter:

i am so grateful for a lot of things in my life and I'm very glad i found stray kids just bc i heard about aussie members lol

i hope everyone is still enjoying this!! things will be picking up soon so hopefully, if people were finding it boring it becomes exciting again aaaaaa

also i know so many people were hoping this was like the chapter Minhø finally told Jisung about his feelings but... i promise the wait is worth it!! i know it seems like its going to go on forever but pls trust me with this hehehe

the leader of Sunsen is lowkey a dickhead too also pretty impulsive to let them stay but then again their situation is a lot different to say if they had just walked into the Capital and asked to be allies. the next few chapters have lots of different settings and they all act different due to both different cultural and social standards etc!! im excited lol i cant stop saying that

see you guys on Sunday!!!

Chan paces around the room anxiously.

“You’ll wear out the floor,” Felix sighs at him and the elder turns, his eyes softening as he sees him looking very comfortable in their shared bed.

“Sorry,” he sighs out but Felix shakes his head at him and pats the space next to him. “I don’t mind,” Felix assures him. “But I think you could use a hug, for sure,”

“When am I ever the one to refuse a hug?” Felix laughs as he tackles him, his arms caging him in a warm embrace. He hums deep in his throat and wraps his arms around Chan’s torso.

“You’re thinking too much,” Felix tells him gently and Chan rolls onto his side and stares at him from where he rests his head on a dense pillow. Felix smiles gently and cups his cheek, his thumb brushes over the smooth skin. “I know you’re on edge,” Felix brings his face closer to Chan’s, enough so their foreheads touch. “I think we all are,” Chan breathes out and Felix hums before presses a soft kiss to his plush lips.

“I think it went much better than it could have.” Felix sighs and shuffles away, his own head resting against a pillow. “We got rooms and we’ll be fed,” Felix laughs. “All at the exchange of labour,” he sighs and smiles. “At least we don’t have to, I don’t know, give up a limb or something!”

“Always the optimist you are,” Chan chuckles as he reaches for his hand to grasp. Felix beams at him, that grin that stretches wide across his face and where his crinkled eyes shine brilliantly in whatever light they’re in. “I can’t always think about the negatives,” Felix tells him softly. “Each day we wake and it’s a new chance. These positive things work in our favours. So here we are, safe in Sunsen and able to work for what we want them to give us. I think that’s fair,”

Chan smiles back at him and hums. Something in him had softened, eased off with Felix's words.

“Do you think they’ll say yes in the end?” Chan mutters and Felix’s eyebrows raise and he shrugs. “We can only hope,”

The younger gently shuffles closer to Chan's heat, his arms circle around his waist and he breathes in deep. “It will take time,” Felix whispers and he looks up at Chan with those twinkling eyes. “But for some reason, I’m fine with that... because you’re here,” Chan's eyes crinkle up when he smiles and Felix laughs softly. He lets him pull him closer until their chests are touching.

“Where ever you are,” Felix whispers to him and Chan's heart thuds in his chest. “That is where my home is. Where our home is,”

Chan had burst into his room a year ago and he had found those twinkling eyes endlessly warm. Chan had grown up without much comfort in his life but Felix had ran with him, warm and cozy like the hearth of a fire on a cold winters day.

He still sometimes lay awake at night and wondered just how Felix had been drawn to him too. How had he fallen for him too?

But Chan doesn't really care because he's here now, in his arms, lips pressed to his. The heat of his body is warming and Chan has never felt quite so welcomed in life than in this moment, the weight of his hips over his own is a comforting weight that presses him into the mattress.

Felix shines in the candlelight, the strands of his blonde hair that hangs close to his eyes is turned to gold and the light reflects in his eyes, turning them molten gold too.

And Chan is left hopeless in his light.

→

Jisung tightens Eunbyul's carrier around himself and with a wince steps through the mud, his hands gripping the mossy fence for purchase.

Sunsen had demanded their efforts to keep their settlement thriving, nothing more and Jisung felt a weight disperse from his chest after the second day of working around the place. The people were kind to them all, not hostile in the slightest.

Someone calls out to him, waving their arms above their head to catch his attention and Jisung smiles softly at the older woman

seated next to a cow in all the mud. “The stalls got wet in the rain last night,” She says when he gets closer. “Seungmin is there already,”

Jisung hums softly and wanders away, not needing her to tell him directly that she wants him to go help him out. He had learned the hard way the first few days of working that people were busy and didn’t want to take the time to explain everything to him. It frustrated him to no end, unsure of all the details and he had almost cried when they yelled at him to go and stop wasting their time.

The days passed quicker here than they did in Mydar or on the ship. They were busied most of their days, working throughout the town.

Seungmin sighs as soon as he spots Jisung. They had opted to wear their own clothing from the ship, but when it got cooler on the days it was muggy and wet, they had gratefully accepted the coats from them.

No one had asked about Eunbyul yet either. They had only been here for just under a week but they had just accepted that she was here. It didn’t stop the looks of confusion when they’d wonder just how these eight young men have a child somehow and how the supply of goats milk wasn’t being used for the child.

“The roof is leaking,” Seungmin points up and Jisung follows the line of his fingers to find a trickle of water running down the walls and across the beams keeping the stable up.

“I don’t know how to fix a roof,” Jisung replies in a whisper and Seungmin nods. “Neither do I,”

“I do,” Minho raises his hand where he just comes around the corner of the barn, a goat following his trail closely. “You guys get the mud and shit out, I’ll go up and fix it,”

“By yourself? Wouldn’t it be quicker if we get someone else to help?” Seungmin questions him and the elder shrugs his shoulders. “Back home I was pretty quick at fixing leaks. Hopefully, I haven’t lost that touch,”

That’s how their time goes by.

When the rainy weather ends, the sun burns down on their skin. Winter isn’t coming as it turns out and they strip out of those coats and warm gloves and bathe in the warm sunlight.

Eunbyul wakes in the mornings fussy and Jisung and Minho try to work quickly to sterilise everything she needs to eat in the small room they were given. Sunsen doesn’t have any electricity at all. Jisung had read— more so listened— to history books that tell about old times like this where fire was used for both lighting and all heating purposes. And boiling a pot of water over an open flame every time she had to be fed had grown more of a hassle than it has ever been before.

Jisung gives up one morning when the sun is shining bright through the gap in their curtains. It had been uncomfortable at first and Minho had woken later, obviously surprised when he saw them. But

Jisung had only shrugged and allowed him to try to help move Eunbyul into a better position to make it more comfortable for the both of them.

The ground is still damp beneath the top soil and he and Minhoo get the job that morning to go out and plough and sow seeds in the empty field.

Minhoo laughs as he carries the plough to the fields. “It’s been a while since I’ve had this job to do,” his hair glows in the sunlight and Jisung squints a little as the sun rises, hovering over Minhoo’s head as if it’s a halo.

Jisung watches him with a smile. Minhoo hadn’t seemed this happy and carefree in a while and when they’re out in the fields, the day grows hotter but they both don’t complain. Minhoo works the earth ready for seeds and Jisung’s covered in dirt as he kneels to sow the seeds but it’s peaceful. There aren’t any prying eyes to watch them as they work and as Jisung feeds his daughter throughout the long day. They have breaks to eat and fix Eunbyul but go back to working as soon as they’ve rested a bit.

Jisung feels as if he’s got the long end of the stick in this ordeal— it’s hot and the sun is bright, no cloud to be seen which burns the skin of his arms. But Minhoo is drenched in sweat as he works the plough in his hands, shoulders probably burning from constant use. Jisung worries that he won’t be able to sleep tonight if his skin burns since he had given up his shirt a while ago, too hot to keep it on any longer. He hopes the solution Hyunjin had made them use daily would keep him safe from the painful blistering that the sun can cause.

He watches as he ploughs, the muscles in his back tense and the

beading of sweat that appears across his tanning skin glistens in that bright sunlight. He turns back a few times, making sure both he and Eunbyul are doing okay and Jisung always gives him a smile and a dirt-covered thumbs up which he grins back at. But Jisung's eyes linger a little too long, down the trickling of sweat down his torso and he swears the sun burns brighter on his cheeks when his eyes take him in.

Sunsen is peaceful. There aren't many similarities to the Capital here. People worked together, to help one another. The Capital killed anyone who even thought differently to the propaganda they wished to brainwash all their citizens with.

The thoughts slip from his mind as time goes on. The seeds he sowed with Minhø have sprouted up through the ground and Jisung feels this sense of pride when he sees the little green leaves he helped come to be.

When night fell, they'd sometimes visit the tavern with the money they all had gathered with their jobs. They didn't have much need of it other than the small rent they needed to give to the innkeeper. It felt like they didn't see each other much and Eunbyul would squeal in happiness when Felix would take her to play with her on the floor with another young baby. Their dinners were full of stories of their days, what worked they had done and what their plans were for tomorrow.

And when they'd retire to their rooms, Jisung would bathe her with Minhø and rock her to sleep while telling her stories of their past travels. All tales when she was sheltered inside of him. Minhø's heart would fill so much in these moments, full of domestic bliss that turns his blood warm and singing in his veins.

The plans they had made have drifted from their minds, lost in the new lifestyle they adapted to quickly.

It doesn't last long.

Throughout their lives, they haven't been able to have a peaceful break. First their entrance to Mydar and then plans of a revolution and now Sunsen. It had been good at first. Working and their time had flown by. They slept good, exhausted from their efforts to get on the leader's good side.

Jisung wakes in the middle of the night to a noise outside. He grabs Eunbyul from her place in the cot next to their bed and shakes Minho awake.

"What was that?"

Just as Minho sits up, their door crashes open and their friends all topple in.

"What the fuck?" Minho girts out and he leaps out of bed to help Seungmin up who fell in.

"There are people outside," Chan breathes out, his eyes wide. Jisung hesitantly gets out of bed, clutches Eunbyul tighter to him whose luckily still asleep. The gleaming firelight flickers as noise scampers

past the room.

“Who?” Jisung grits out. Hyunjin shrugs his shoulders, but there’s a look of fear in his eyes.

“Don’t you guys remember?” Changbin speaks up. He’s gripping tightly onto Seungmin’s hand. The taller boys thumb rubs against his skin, trying to bring them both some comfort. No one has the mind to ask them if something is going on between them. They were stuck to each other's sides almost and it was typically to find them always touching, holding hands or brushing hands over skin.

“When we first came here he asked if we were from... Hava? What if...” Changbin finishes softly and Jeongin gasps. “That would make sense,” He agrees.

“But when has anything made sense this last year?” Jisung comments and Felix narrows his eyes at him for his pessimistic comment.

“I’ll go and look,” Minho says as he throws on a jacket, the one Jisung had made him. Chan narrows his eyes at him. “Not without me, you’re not.”

“Then hurry up,” Minho hisses back. He gives a soft smile to the rest of his friends, his eyes lingering on Jisung with Eunbyul whose just awakened. “Stay in here and don’t come out until we come back,”

Felix runs over to Jisung as they leave. Jeongin follows and sits behind him, allowing him to rest his head on his shoulder.

“It’s almost like we can never catch a break,”

“I think it was more of a wake-up call...” Felix mutters softly. “We fell too far into this life without talking about the revolution... perhaps we needed this to make us remember?”

“Well, I certainly hope the leader will let us explain soon... he mightn’t even say yes to it either.” Seungmin breathes out.

Minho runs into the village's centre where a large crowd of people carrying torches. His eyes grow wide when he witnesses them taking bags of grain that they had helped harvest not long ago and run with them.

Chan turns to him and shakes his head in disbelief. “They’re stealing all their stuff,” Chan whispers and Minho's fists ball up by his sides.

Suddenly something grips hard around both their arms and they’re flying through an open door that shuts promptly behind them.

The red-headed man they had seen only once since their arrival is breathing heavily, his eyes tired and his lips carved into a grimace.

“Your village is being attacked yet you are hiding?” Minho goes to

step forwards but Chan holds him back. From their first impression of the man, Chan had gotten the impression he's a man that takes words to heart and will not forgive easily.

The storage room the Minho had filled with Hyunjin and Changbin just days ago is now empty, save a single bag of grain left in the corner of the shed.

"We have learned to not fight back during raids. Instead, we follow them back and take back what was ours." He grits out.

"Why would you guard the storages then and stop all this from happening?" Chan asks him. He flinches at a loud bang that echoes in the air.

"Hava and Sunsen have been in a feud for a hundred years. If it were that simple we would have done so already," Chan reaches for Minho's fist and takes it into his larger hand, gripping it hard. His younger friend shuffles closer to him.

"Then what do we do?"

The man's eyes flicker to the door and he hums softly. "We wait. They will take most of our things, save the extras we have hidden underneath the hall."

"And you've never had them take anything else...?"

The man's eyes suddenly darken at Chan's question. "You ask many questions, young man," he grumbles but Chan stands taller. "I am trying to protect my own family, too,"

"They do not take much else. They had burnt buildings down before, thrown wagons of dirt down our wells, forgetting we live between the winding rivers. They are out to get us down. Sometimes crops are trampled,"

"And yet you hideaway," Minho seethes out.

The man takes a step closer to him, glaring down at him.

He stands almost two whole heads taller than Minho, thick with muscle but Minho takes another step closer, his shoulders squared as he glares back up at him.

Chan feels like he almost can't breathe looking at his friend. Perhaps he has a thing for standing up to the leaders of each settlement and outdoing them in every essence. He is smaller than him by a fair bit but Minho looms over him, hanging like a dark shadow.

The leader whose name they still are unknown to gives Chan a hesitant look before taking a step back himself, probably uncomfortable in that dangerous predatory glance that he has seemed to perfect.

"We stay so it doesn't get messier, we do not wish to end up in a war

and kill everyone.” Minho turns back to Chan at that.

“What if you had that problem fixed? What would you say then?” The man's eyes narrow. “What?” He hisses out. “A war? Are you mad? Why would we go to war with them if we were on good terms?”

“No, I didn’t mean—“

“We have tried to mend our two villages together, but they never corporate with our efforts. We will never be on good terms unless they stop overfishing our rivers and stealing our grain,”

Chan turns to the door. “I do not understand why you pulled us aside,”

“Because you are new. You are untainted by these views we have had since our births. Do you wish to gain our trust? To talk to me about what it is you want in return? You all have shown me you are good workers. Loyal and good at all the tasks assigned to you. Even that little one with the baby,” his eyes flicker to Minho then. “You show you are a good father, a faithful husband. You have proved that you are not bad people,”

Minho doesn’t have the time to explain that he is not Jisung's husband, nor that Eunbyul isn’t his daughter. Chan's eyes rake over him and something akin to realisation flashes in his eyes. Minho doesn’t quite understand why everyone that does not know their story assumes he and Jisung are something and that Eunbyul is their child.

He doesn't have time to correct the leader because a scream is cutting through the air, sharp and it rings in Minho's ears.

He has heard this scream before. The same shuttering breath that had turned into panicked yells as he fell down a mountain with him in tow.

"Jisung," he mutters out. Chan's eyes go wide too and Minho bursts out of the door and runs.

Minho has run as fast as he could when Jisung is involved. When he had run into Mydar's looming structure, only to watch him bleed out and follow helplessly when Chan had taken him instead.

His scream echoes throughout his nerves, tingling at the ends of his fingers and lighting them on fire with panic. Nothing would happen to him. Not while he was around.

He rounds the corner, grateful that there aren't any people from Hava in his way.

He freezes for a split second when he takes in the scene. But he doesn't stop for long before he's running again.

Jisung is standing in the doorway, crying and screaming as a man, taller than Hyunjin has his nasty hands gripped around Eunbyul,

snatching her from his grip as he knees him in the stomach. She's screaming and crying and just as he goes to run, the baby screaming in his arms, tiny fists reaching in Jisung's direction, now on the floor at the force he had used to rip his baby away— Minho bashes into his back, grabbing him by the neck and yanking him back with one arm, the other scoops Eunbyul up as he falls.

Jisung runs to him, taking her into his grip and shuffling back to the building as he cries with her, clutching her tight.

And Minho explodes onto that man.

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Notes for the Chapter:

HIII so my god this week as been so crazy.... earlier this week there was a big flood and that got a bit crazy a few times, lucky everything was okay in the end but i know other people weren't as lucky :(((Some after-effects haven't been so great :(

i was going to post double chapters this today only if i got enough writing done ahead but i haven't... but i did post 27 early so there's that!! this chapter isn't as big but that's okay.

As always thank you everyone for reading and THANK YOU guys that leave comments and feedback u guys r the best MWAH

ALSO MINSUNG ASBDFHJ

30. 29→

His fist collides with the side of his head, his knuckle digging into the softer part of his temple. He crumbles to the ground without a scream, unconscious already. Minho hears Jisung breath out heavily in Felix's embrace and rage fills him so violently that he pronounces on him again, his foot slamming against his ribs.

But then he's pulled backwards, someone yelling in his ear. He turns in their hold to find the leader of Sunsens, eyes wide with terror.

He rips himself free out of the man's grip and hurries over to his friends huddled around Jisung and Eunbyul. He doesn't spare the leader another glance. His anger would rise again and he doesn't trust himself to not knock him out next.

"Just what were you thinking?" The man grits out and Minho turns back to him, eyes narrowed in a glare. "I was helping a friend," he growls out. "I wasn't going to stand there and watch him run away with the baby, was I?"

"Please," Changbin breathes out as he steps forwards. "Let us explain our situation now," Minho's eyes follow his friend and Chan comes to stand beside him, eyebrows furrowed and his eyes dark. The leader huffs but Chan begins talking before they receive an answer.

"That child is different to every single child in this village. In the world even," the man scoffs and Jisung wipes his tears away, clutches his now clammy baby, safe in her father's arms and her belly full and takes those steps forward to Chan.

“She is my daughter,” Jisung speaks up and the leader sighs. “I was born in September, in the slums of a supposed great city. When I was just a boy that same great city then became rampant with disease. It only infected women,” the man's head tilts the slightest bit. “And killed them quickly after the first single symptom appeared. So the population of women were scarce and the government came up with such a brilliant idea,” He spits out those words like poison. It reminds Chan of how he used to talk when they first broke out. When he was scared of everything, weary but so strong in his own way.

“I grew her inside of my own womb,” and then the man's eyes widen with shock. “I was eleven when they locked me away. And when I escaped seven years later I was already pregnant,”

“That is...” the man gulps and his hand grips at the back of his neck while he frowns. His eyes turn down to him, panicked.

“What do you all wish for then?”

“To take them down, of course,” Chan replies and the spark of rushing fear through the man's eyes tells them that strangers of different lands were repulsed by the actions the Capital had taken.

“That is why you wished to make us allies? This is why you came here to get us on your side so you could fight these people? I will not allow my people to fight for such a wayward cause,”

“They murdered any citizen that they thought breathed wrong,”

Changbin grits out, his fists are balled up by his sides and he would've tried to land a punch on his nose if it wasn't for Seungmin's comforting touch across his back.

Changbin's own father had been murdered with them. The last of his family gone with a single bang from those white guns. And that was it for him. The government killed anyone they liked, not a care about the population because they were making their own incubators in a lab.

And some of those boys stand with them now.

But things never did quite add up.

Jisung was six months pregnant at the time they realised they simply didn't know where they were or how to track them down. They had gone too far in such little time and maybe they were just a day behind them, but they had gotten away in time.

But that day was an awakening.

The Capital were up to something. Something else other than locking up young boys and forcing them to birth countless babies.

But they couldn't figure out exactly what it was. They were building

an army of those white armoured men, who carried around those white guns and murdered innocents each day.

Brainwashing. They wanted all their citizens to believe in their absolute power, want them to agree and faulty and blindly lead them. And those ones who showed signs of disobeying— the fight rings that were deemed illegal, the ones who were brave enough to ask where all those young boys had gone after they hadn't returned home.

But the reason why they wanted them all to think the same, to believe they were the answer, the best they'd seen.

Fern had been the one to finally mention it. When Chan and Jisung had gone and visited them that time.

The Capital were greedy. And the reason they didn't go after them or try harder to find them was because of plans they were working on. She suspects they're planning some sort of their own take-over. And during that, they'd find them again. Somewhere in the lands that others occupy.

Jisung wasn't the only one thinking of war plans.

"The Capital will stop at nothing," he warns him in a low voice. But the leader shakes his head at him.

"I think it would be best if you all left. Now."

Something falls inside Jisung and he feels almost like he's going to throw up. But Chan grips his hand and begins to walk away without a second thought.

"Chan, we can't just leave," he hisses but he shakes his head back at him.

"We are right now. But we will come back and make him change his mind," he looks at him in the eye. "It's changed from just a young boy wanting revenge to a possibility of something like the Great War occurring again,"

Fear feels like icy water that he's plunged into. Chan grips his hand tight, turns once to see his friends following behind him and then they don't take a single look back.

The air is cool when they travel back to their ship and Jisung feels hopeless almost when he's sitting in the lounge area of the ship. He had hoped it would've been easier, but everything told him that it would be just as hard as he thought.

He clutches Eunbyul tight and when Minhø slides into bed with him that night, Eunbyul sleeping in her bassinet beside them, he cries and Minhø catches all his tears and doesn't speak a word because no one needs words now. All as disappointed and equally lost.

But they're together and that enough for them now. In Minhø's warm embrace he feels safe.

He doesn't have the scent of ever-calming petrichor but there's a lingering woody note, a soft subtle smell like honey and lavender underlying the stronger scent.

Jisung sleeps well that night, safe and sound in Minho's warming and protective embrace.

→

"We can't just get up and leave," Jeongin says in the morning as they eat a bowl of stew.

Chan sighs and hum and Jeongin puts his bowl down and stands up tall. He would look much more threatening if his hair wasn't all over the place from sleep and his cheeks puffy.

"We should go to Hava," Changbin cocks a brow at him and Hyunjin scratches his neck as he looks up at him.

"And what? Get kicked out because we have some sort of ties with Sunsen?" Minho scoffs and Jeongin narrows his eyes at him. "No," He huffs out. "We should try to settle the feud they have going on. Then they'll listen to us,"

There's silence for a while.

"Uhh... I think that might be pushing it a little, Jeongin..." Jisung whispers. "If they couldn't fix it over the course of hundreds of years or so how are eight young men and a baby going to fix things?"

"I think everyone doubts our abilities," Jeongin sighs. "We've done the unthinkable so many times already, why should we doubt ourselves now?"

"Because this time it seems a little too far out of our experience range," Hyunjin sighs and Jeongin gasps. "And you four had experience of breaking out four boys from a highly guarded building?"

Chan snorts. "That took years of planning, though,"

"I did once break into the Capital storage rooms and take back one hundred cabbages for the slums," Minho pipes up and Jisung lifts a brow at him. He swears he vaguely remembers have a whole, fresh cabbage that he brought home once but his memory of his childhood is rather hazy.

"So are we just going to give up?" He then presses on and Jisung shuffles, pulling his knees to his chest.

"We can't," Seungmin replies and Jisung nods along with him. "Right, so we have to at least try to get on their good sides," Jeongin

breathes out his hands on his hips.

But the moment they arrive in Hava their hopefulness is shattered once again.

Minho slides in front of Jisung just before the man that had tried to grab Eunbyul the previous night can punch him in the nose. He takes the hit though and he buckles at the force of the impact. He feels the warm tickle downhill nose and he winces at the blood on his hands when he pulls them away from his tender nose.

“You bastard,” He growls out and the man doesn’t see the kick to his groin at all. He collapses, howling out in pain while Minho turns to his friends while the people of Hava rush forwards.

Jisung vision fuzzes at the corners when the stark red flowing from Minho's nose fills his vision. Hyunjin rushes forwards, tugs Minho by his wrist, pulls him back. Minho lifts the hem of his shirt to press against his bleeding nose.

“What is this?” A voice hisses and with his free hand, Minho pulls Jisung back. Hyunjin grips the younger’s hand and holds him tight to his side.

“It’s them! Those rascals that were in Sunsen!” A dark-haired man comes forward at the other man's accusation.

A pair of dark eyes narrow at them. It feels like the situation at Sunsen and Jisung shivers a bit.

“I was told there was a group of boys helping Sunsen,” he spits at them. “We weren’t helping for the hell of it,” Minho hisses back out and the man that Jisung assumes is the lead tilts his head at him.

“That’s the thing,” the man that Minho had kicked gets himself back to his feet and points a slimy finger to Jisung. “The one I was talking about!”

Felix narrows his eyes and takes a step forward. “If you say one thing about my friend, I will not let you get away with it,” he warns but the man laughs at him.

“Friends! He has taken a child away from her mother and yet you call him a friend!”

The pang that comes with the man's words was unexpected. he hadn't thought of this situation and now that he thinks about it, there could be room for a misunderstanding because it's not every day some boy has a child and raises it by himself with his friends.

“I didn't steal her,” Jisung growls out.

“She is too young to be away from her mother,” the man grits out and Jisung narrows his eyes at him.

"Can't we just leave them to rot instead?" He hisses to his friends and Chan squeezes his eyes shut.

He turns back to the man and says the only thing he can think of through his muddled anger clouding his mind. "What if I am her mother?" He has never thought of himself as such, and he won't but this man is not worth knowing his story.

He frowns at him though. "You do not look like--"

"I don't think it's very cool of you to judge him so much when you don't even know us," Hyunjin pipes up. "It's stupid,"

"Yeah, so what I had a baby and *I can* provide her with nutrients. I'm not talking about it any longer, were actually here to talk about a mother fucking war that's going to start while you're carrying on over me looking after my own kid," Jisung spits it out like its the simplest thing in the world and the dark-haired male that he thinks is the leader of this not so... accepting village flinches slightly.

"Perhaps we should sit and talk about this instead?" The leader whispers out and Jisung scoffs but gestures for him to lead the way.

"A war you say?" He had introduced himself as Nic, the appointed leader of Hava after his father passed last spring.

Chan talks along with Changbin to Nic about the details of everything, the revolution that would hit them but also the Capitals wants and their plans that Fern was so certain they'd act on shortly. She suspected a year or two at the most. They didn't have much time if it was an approximate guesstimate.

Felix has enveloped him in a hug for the past few minutes after arriving in Nic's family home. Hyunjin is tending to Minho's potentially broken nose while the elder expresses his distaste for the doctor's hands on him regularly. Jisung's close to hitting him himself.

Jeongin and Seungmin are sitting with Chan and Changbin, offering what they know as insight to the tyranny the Capital is guilty of.

"Are you okay?" Felix whispers to him and Jisung shrugs softly. He knows he isn't. The words he had spoken had hurt him, made him wonder if this is what their journey would be of. People judging him and looking down at him for something that was never his fault to begin with.

"I can't believe he thought he could say things like that to you..." Felix mumbles. "Don't take anything he had to heart,"

"I won't," Jisung sighs back out. "Although it's kind of funny he thought we stole her..." Felix snorts at his friend and gives his arm a soft slap.

Eunbyul coos up at them and Jisung smiles weakly. “She’s growing up so fast,” Felix muses as he brushes her cheek. “It only felt like it was yesterday when I could feel her in your belly,”

“Yeah,” Jisung agrees softly. He looks down at his daughter and his heart flips in his chest at those wide hazel eyes and the heart-shaped grin. “Although I can say I do not miss the constant need to pee with her jabbing my bladder all day,” Felix giggles quietly and hums. “She looks a lot like you,” Felix whispers and Jisung nods.

“But she looks so different too...” Jisung adds and Felix sits up straight and grabs his hands. His eyes are shining with sadness and his brows are furrowed deeply. “You don’t think about that too much do you?” Jisung’s eyes fall to his daughter and he nods softly.

“Of course I wonder who had you know... sired her? No one created her with me I refuse for that to be the way I refer to it because... I had no part in it... I don’t know if they did, I don’t care though. I was the one that grew her inside of me who gave birth to her. She is mine and mine only.” Felix smiles softly at him.

Jisung squirms when he feels multiple pairs of eyes fall onto him.

“Sung,” Chan calls out gently. His vision lands on him and he breathes in deep, steadied by those warm honey eyes. “Can we talk with you for a second? Nic wants to know more,” his eyes shine and underneath the table where his palms rest, he shoots him a thumbs up. A good sign.

He hauls himself up, cradles Eunbyul’s head and lowers himself down

on a chair.

“Tell me,” The dark haired man whispers. He reaches out to clutch at Jisung's hand. He flinches from the touch but he doesn't pull away. “Did you truly carry your baby yourself?” Jisung presses his lips to a thin line and gently takes his hand back. He shuffles the sling Eunbyul's in and successfully unties it to let her out. She stretches and coos up at him. He smiles at her and turns her to the leader.

“My daughter,” he whispers. “Born in Mydar, a settlement east of here. I grew her, carried her for eight months,” Nic's eyes sparkle in wonder.

“It is... unheard of... despicable actions made to give you the functions to carry and birth a child,” he meets his eyes and Jisung tries to smile gently.

“She is beautiful,” Nic murmurs and Jisung nods along. “Isn't she,”

The leader lifts his eyes to his friends around the room.

“I might be rather new to this village head situation, but this is a cause I will not ignore. My village is not so full of men, but I offer you my full support of my fighting men and anything else I can give. You must forgive our earlier hostility, the impact our village suffered after the Great War. We were not the best neighbours, but we were afraid to fight back, knowing that's how the war came to be. But I have hope this world and I will do my best to convince the others that this isn't just a personal battle of yours.”

The corners of Chan's mouth lift upwards and Jisung chuckles underneath his breath.

Two weeks later they're standing in front of the red-haired leader of Sunsen, whose name they learnt from Nic—Rowan.

The misunderstanding between the two villages had been mended after hard work of getting them to listen to each other.

Constant overfishing and dividing lands was the biggest issue and surprising they had gotten them to at least corporate with each other long enough to finally put plans in action.

Not only that but Rowan had finally gotten off his high horse and listened to what they had to say. Nic was there when it happened and he had spoken of the child that Jisung carried around with him all day and Rowan was a bit more than surprised to find out that he was her father but carried her.

Jisung had just laughed awkwardly while Rowan gawked at him.

It had taken Rowan a bit more convincing to get him to understand the impact this very likely war would have on everything. But he eventually understood and agreed to ally with Mydar.

The Capital was much bigger than all these three settlements still. They were going to need a lot more people on their side if they wanted to even make a dint in the Capital.

After a brief meeting with Fern they decided to bring back just one representative for both of the villages. Nic had volunteered himself and left his older sister in charge instead.

He had admitted shyly that she was better off being the village head than he was.

Before leaving they had given the communication device to his sister that Fern had given Jisung those few days before leaving. She learns the controls easily and after that, everything is set to go back.

Minho had cleared out his stuff from the room he had taken and moved into Jisung's room again who was happy for him to stay. Jisung's always slept better when Minho is around anyway.

Jisung sighs and Felix peers over at him from where he's playing with Eunbyul on Jisung's bed. "What's up, Sung?"

"Oh?" He perks up and looks at him with wide eyes. Felix cocks his head at him and he smiles bashfully.

"I was just thinking... yeah,"

“Sounds suspicious,” Felix picks up Eunbyul and shuffles closer to Jisung. “Fess up,” he giggles and Jisung sighs shaking his head at him.

“It’s just... Minhoo...”

something piques Felix's attention because he suddenly looks rather serious. “What about Minhoo?”

“I don’t know,” Jisung admits softly. “We’ve spent a lot of time together and I just think that... does he act differently around me than what he does around you or am I just imagining things?”

Felix sighs out deeply. “He does,” Jisung looks at him rather surprised. He wasn’t expecting just a straight forward answer, honestly.

“But that’s up to you to figure out why,” Felix stands, hands him Eunbyul who claws at his shirt and slips out of his room.

Jisung stares down at Eunbyul who laughs loudly. “He’s weird, huh?” She laughs again and Jisung laughs with her.

→

The decision to go back to Mydar before visiting any more settlements is spoken about on the first day back on the ship.

The travel takes a little under a week and when the silhouette of Mydar appears in Jisung's vision something pulls in his heartstrings.

Hyunjin sighs next to him and Jisung lifts his head to gaze up at him.

“And like that, we’re back,” he mutters out and Jisung hums. “But not for long,” he replies and Hyunjin smiles down at him.

The ship pulls into the launching dock, where they had left a month ago and Jisung's stomach flips with what he believes to be excitement. He had missed Fern and Isa and their warm demeanours and how they both loved Eunbyul to bits.

The ship clangs slightly when it lands against the metal dock. Jisung kisses the top of Eunbyul's head and takes a few steps closer to the door. Felix is buzzing next to him and quietly, Nic settles beside Jisung, smiling down at Eunbyul. She kicks in his hold, her legs bashing against Jisung's chest. He pouts down at her and she laughs.

The noise of the door opening scares her and she buries her face into Jisung's neck. He coos at her and holds her head as the doors open wide and Fern and Isa are standing there, smiles plastered across their faces.

“Welcome back,” Minho jumps out first, offers the hand for Jisung to

take to soften the impact and Eunbyul squeals for the few moments his feet aren't flat on the ground.

Nic lands next to Jisung and breathes out in awe. "I wasn't aware such places existed..." Jisung chuckles slightly. "It's nice, isn't it?"

"Jisung," Isa rushes forwards and envelops him in a tight hug. Eunbyul squeals out in her hold and the woman laughs, taking her into her arms and rocking her. The six-month-old giggles and reaches for her hair and tugs on the dark locks. She winces and Jisung reaches out for his daughter's fist, untangling Isa's hair wrapped around her tiny fist.

"Sorry she likes pulling on things at the moment," Isa laughs and hands her back as Fern settles beside her wife.

Fern smiles broadly and reaches out to brush her fingers over Jisung's cheek. "You have made it back in one piece. For that I am very grateful," Her eyes flicker to Nic who blushes at the intensity of her gaze. Jisung had forgotten how intimidating her gaze was when he first met her but now all he sees in her eyes is warmth and love—tenderness that she wants to show him so dearly.

Her eyes fall around their group— to Chan, to the new face once more. She breathes out heavily and gestures to the back of the room.

"I see we should be involving ourselves in a meeting now,"

→

Eunbyul sleeps in Isa's arms during the meeting, finally giving Jisung's arms a break from holding her pretty much all day. Changbin had joked that his arms must be massive now, and that somewhat proved true when Chan taught him how to flex his muscles that have built up over the months after Eunbyul's birth.

"We have gotten a bit on intel on the Capital," Isa says when they first sit down. "We sent two men and they got into the slums very easily— they must work on their guard patrols, honestly," Jisung leans forwards, his forearms resting on the cool surface of the table they're sitting around.

"They didn't stay long but the disease is still rampant in areas and they did mention the white guns you have spoken about,"

"They're still murdering innocent people then," Chan grits out and Isa nods sadly.

"We couldn't prove that they're planning something bigger but... it seems extremely likely,"

"Then we will just say they are if the evidence is enough, can't we do that?" Nic asks and Fern sighs out. "There has not been a single war in my lifetime, or my grandparents lifetime even. I don't know how such things work..."

“Then we should just prepare for the worst, right?” Changbin asks and Isa hums. “I believe it would be wise to do so,”

“So we must go to other settlements quickly. Should we send out more teams?”

Fern and Isa share a look between them.

“I know this isn’t the best news but Mydar has not needed to fly in ships since it was founded... we do not have another ship big enough to support a team or for long distance travels,” Isa tells them gently with a sigh.

“So it’s just us, then,” Jisung concludes and she nods her head.

“Well,” Nic clears his throat. “The people of Sunsen and Hava are adequate farmers. If food supplies are needed during... wartime I am certain we’d be able to help with that. The floods that regularly occur have made our land fertile.”

“That would be great,” Fern nods her head at him. “And as you guys find other settlements, tell them it is not just us that are going to be affected, but the whole world— we will figure out just how to support our fighting force that will come to be,”

“We will leave in the morning,” Chan pipes up and Jisung's heart twists in his chest. He feels effortlessly comfortable in the presence of the two leaders of Mydar.

“Time is precious,” Fern replies and Jisung breathes out shakily in return.

“Do you have the device to contact the leader of Hava and Sunsen?” Seungmin hands it over and Fern flickers the screen on.

The meeting goes on for another hour, informing Nic’s sister of what is to come and what they think they should be focusing on for helping out. She agrees quickly, Rowan by her side that agrees after a bit of thinking.

Jisung lingers behind after the meeting to talk to the women. They had a lot to say to him, how much they had wished for their safe return. Jisung gives into his feelings and burrows himself in both of their embraces and in a soft voice, he speaks back to them.

After at least an hour of catching up after the month they had been apart, Jisung carefully takes his sleeping daughter from Isa and wanders into their ship again. It would be too much hassle if they went back to their previous residence for just a night.

Hyunjin grips Minhoo by the arm when he goes to follow Jisung whose going to bathe Eunbyul who woke up as soon as they entered the ship once more.

Minho frowns at him but doesn't fight out of his grip.

"You've been really obvious lately. Jisung will find out if you're not careful,"

Minho's glare deepens. "What if that's what I want?" He hisses out and Hyunjin's eyes widen a fraction. "So you say I cannot do that but it's fine for you to do it?"

"That's different," Minho hisses. "I'm not going to ask him anything. And he already knows you like him," Hyunjin's grip on him loosens.

"So if he realises what will you do then?"

Minho scoffs. "I don't have to do anything. That's up to him to decide,"

Hyunjin takes a step backwards. "You know why I first even liked him?"

Minho's silence tells him to go on. "Because he would fight for himself. He'd protect himself and he'd never listen to anyone until he realised the comfort and warmth others could give him. He has a fighting spirit and he burns,"

"That must be it, then," Minho mutters. His gaze softens. "That flame that he has. The beautiful burning, I feel like a stupid moth drawn to

a flame, I am helplessly enthralled by that burning flame that he is,”

Hyunjin's eyes flicker to the ground.

“I was selfish. And for that I am sorry. If he comes to accept your feelings and reciprocate them, I won't hurt like I thought I would before,”

Hyunjin leaves and Changbin rounds the corner. The soft look tells him that he had heard everything.

“Like a moth drawn to a flame,” Changbin mutters. “I believe the moth always gets the fire in the end?”

Minho's heart lurches in his chest.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HII so i am so glad march is over i hate march god. I've always not really liked it bc things are always hard in march for some reason but this year the universe really said 'u have no idea' but this is another new beginning and i will make the most of it!!

AHHHH I'm really sorry about the delay in me replying to comments i dont rlly have an excuse only really that sometimes IDK WHAT TO SAY???! I'm

sorry lol I'll try harder

also I'm so busy atm so I'm finding it hard to write bc when i have free time i just wanna do nothing lol

AND JUNG FINALLY REALISING MINHO TREATS HIM VERY DIFFERENTLY UMMM PROGRESS????
scream with me pls

anyways!!! I'm rllyy happy that people are finding the plot so enjoyable and thank u for all the compliments LAJDJH truthfully idk what I'm doing sometimes so i wing it AND then a light blub goes ha that fits u genius!! BUT i also do have a very extensive plot outline that is too many words in itself lmao

I'm hoping to post more fics soon and to get writing them but overmorrow is taking up most of my time so idk how that will go aaaaa I'm also in my last year of high school and very focused on my art atm too but we shall see I'm rambling now like i always do here AAAA

BYE I LOVE U ALL HAVE A GOOD WEEK!!

(ALSO CHAPTER 30???/ how did we get here this quick omg)

31. 30→

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry for the delay!! i was super busy yesterday and didn't have time to sit down and update I'm sorry!! but i do really like this chapter so i hope u guys do too!!

Jisung ducks underneath Jeongin's leg just in time and while he's caught off guard, Jisung takes the chance to tackle him to the ground, arms wrapping around his hips and dragging him to the ground beneath them.

Jeongin scrambles away but Jisung leaps, his knee pinning his hip to the ground as he hauls the rest of himself to sit on his chest.

"I think I won," Jisung beams and Jeongin groans before giving him a thumbs up.

Clapping fills their ears and they both turn as Jisung's getting off Jeongin and helping him back to his feet to see Minho smirking, applauding their sparring while he leans against the wall.

"You both have made really good progress," his eyes twinkle and Jisung cocks a brow at him. That look in his eyes is the same predatory gaze that Jisung had once been wary of back when they first met but now Jisung has grown used to the intensity of his gazes, how his eyes would smoulder sometimes and others they'd twinkle, soft and warm.

“Thanks,” Jisung smiles and Jeongin claps back in return. “Since you won, you should fight against Minho!” Jisung’s eyes bulge and Minho chokes on his own saliva.

“He’ll kill me,” Jisung deadpans and Minho scoffs. “I’d never hurt you,” he tells him and Jisung chuckles while Jeongin cocks a brow.

“You know you are good,” Minho tells him and Jisung’s eyes widen a fraction. “You’ve taken it on really fast.”

“And you had a whole ass baby not long ago,” Jeongin pipes in. “You’re really good,”

“If you guys keep saying that I might just want to thump more people,” he laughs and Minho shrugs as he wanders forwards. “And I’d be right behind you,” he whispers and the younger snorts. “You shouldn’t support my bad behaviour,”

Minho throws his head back and laughs, hearty and clear and something in Jisung tingles. It spreads warmth around his body and the nerve-endings at his fingertips buzz.

“So are you going to fight me?” Jisung asks and Minho shrugs. “Or are you going to fight me?” He replies cheekily and Jisung rolls his eyes at him.

“Imagine if I win,” Jisung giggles. “Wouldn’t you just be devastated losing to me?” It surprises Minho at first. Jisung using sarcasm and humour. It had become much more regular than his brooding that he had only done in the early days. Minho would never not be proud of

him and all the progress he has made.

“Oh certainly,” Minho replies with a roll of his eyes and Jisung laughs. Felix wanders in with Changbin and Jeongin pulls them to the seats where Eunbyul is playing with Chan. His finger is trapped in her mouth as she bites down on it and Chan laughs at her when he wiggles it free and she dives for it again.

Minho rolls his shoulders and Jisung bends into a squat.

“Let’s dance then,” Minho smiles, his lips curling up into that sly grin of his and Jisung bites back a laugh.

Minho lunges first, his hands gripping around Jisung's waist.

Jisung had never sparred with Minho before. He had with Chan and Changbin, the other three that were learning too but he’d never been against Hyunjin or Minho before. He had seen how Minho moved, quick and with no hesitation.

And Minho is quick. But he seems to hesitate a little bit more than he usually would. Jisung escapes his grip, twirls behind him and with a swift movement, brings his knee up to crash into his lower back followed by his foot sweeping under his feet and taking him down to the ground.

Jisung falls down with him, Minho's legs curled around his calf. His smile is full of mischief when Jisung locks eyes with him. Jisung tries

to get back to his feet, fighting off Minho who spreads his thighs and slumps down on top of him. Minho has always been one of the strongest out of them all, and even with his baby-carry muscles that had developed over the past six months, Jisung is as useless as a bug trying to get out of his grip.

“Hi,” Minho smiles down at him and Jisung looks at him in the eye.

He feels the warmth of his body pressed against his own and his heart quickens in his chest and Jisung's mind whirls at the sudden feeling. Minho lifts his upper body, caging him in between his biceps and with the rest of his broader body.

Jisung thought he would've been scared. When he had first broken out with them when he had lost it when he saw Hyunjin and how he had scampered away from Changbin. Jisung has unpleasant memories of positions similar to this— how they'd pry him open without a word from him, exposed and unable to stop anything. It had been so cold, the air nipping at his bare skin.

But Minho's weight pressing against him is warm and Jisung doesn't feel scared at all. His cheeks flush when he realises he's enjoying the close proximity and how his warm breath tickles the skin of his bare neck.

Jisung wiggles underneath him when his body tingles again and Minho slowly pulls himself away from him.

“I still can't beat you,” he mutters and Minho hums. “You'll have to keep trying until you do then,” Jisung looks up at him with wide eyes

and finds his ears burning red. Jisung heart stutters in his chest and he breathes in deeply, trying to get it to return to its usual pattern.

Having to try again could result in Minho pressed against him again. Jisung's mind screams at him and he hurries back up to where their friends are and grabs Eunbyul who had become frustrated with Chan's finger, now hungry.

"I've made a decision," Jisung speaks up as Eunbyul settles against him. Hyunjin and Seungmin had returned from their stock up of medical supplies, thinking it might become useful in the future and now that everyone was here Jisung can finally tell them what he had ultimately decided.

"We knew a little about Sunsen and Hava before we went... maybe that was why I felt better in taking Eunbyul along, but now this is different again. We don't know where we're going to end up, how long it'll take... and I can't risk her being in danger again. It was selfish of me to take her," he pauses and brushes his thumb against her cheek.

"It wasn't selfish," Felix tells him and his friends nod. "Even the nurses and doctors said she was too young to part with you. And since the formulas have all made her ill so far, it was the right decision," Felix pats his thigh as he speaks and Jisung feels a little less bad after that.

"She's older now and I'm sure they'll figure something out for her here. We will go on the rest of your journey without her," Jisung breaks as soon as he finishes talking. Eunbyul unlatches as stares up

at him with her wide eyes. His hand brushes by her cheek.

“Oh Sung,” Felix pulls him into a hug and Chan's hand rests against his shoulder.

“I don't want to leave her behind... I want to see her grow before my own eyes but we can't take her. These journeys aren't suitable for babies. She stays,”

And although Jisung knows he is doing the right thing for her and her safety, his heart aches with the mere thought of waking up and not seeing her sleeping face, chubby cheeks and lips pouty, long lashes brushing her fat cheeks.

His heart would hurt every time he thought of her but it was better than risking her safety.

“I spoke to Fern and Isa when the meeting finished... I asked them if they'd take care of her in return. Everyone knows how much they adore her. They accepted,” he tells them in a weak voice.

Eunbyul coos up at him and Jisung doesn't hold back his tears.

→

They all help to get Eunbyul's things packed away to give to Fern and Isa.

She would graduate her bassinet soon, but it was big in the first place so Jisung hopes she wouldn't need a new bed until she was at least one and he hopes he will be back with her before then.

The boxes stack up into just two and Jisung watches with sad eyes as his friends say goodbye to his baby daughter.

She coos at them, unaware she would soon be parted from them and her favourite person. Jisung's heart hurt but he wouldn't turn back. But if she cried, Jisung fears he mightn't be strong enough.

Felix carefully takes her from Seungmin who was snuggling her and peppers kisses all over her face. She giggles out, grabbing at his face with chubby hands. Felix gazes over at Jisung and smiles sadly.

"Take all the time you need," Chan whispers as Jisung nears, his hands out for his baby.

"I think id rather be really quick," Jisung murmurs softly as she's dropped into his arms. She snuggles up to him the moment she's in his arms and his heart clenches.

Minho comes in, carrying both the boxes stacked on top of each other

and his gaze is just as sad as all the others.

“We have the option to call in a lot,” Jisung reminds them. “So we can see her at least on the screen,” But he’ll miss the weight of her in his arms. “These muscles I built up might disappear now,” he chuckles and Jeongin pats his shoulder trying to offer him comfort.

Minho's presence beside him is strong and comforting as they walk down the halls. Eunbyul babbles in his hold all the way to Fern and Isa’s residence. Her legs kick into his sides and Jisung knows he’ll miss that when they’re walking around on their journey.

The two ladies answer the door together, both smiling down sadly at Jisung.

“I couldn’t have found any other better people to love and care for her while we’re gone,” he mutters over a cup of tea. Isa strokes his back and gently takes Eunbyul. The baby snuggles into her hold, used to the times Isa would take her and cuddle while Jisung got his ass handed to him on a silver plater while he sparred with Chan.

“I will send you updates of everything she has done,” Isa smiles, her eyes crinkling and the smile lines around her mouth from years of beaming grins deepening.

Fern and Minho have gone to set up her own little space together while Jisung and Isa were to talk about her schedule and what to do for her.

“I know Fern and I have never really said this... I don’t know if we needed to,” her brown eyes shine under the morning sun. Jisung finds flecks of gold scattered through them. “We’ve spent quite a lot of time together and you are dear to us. You all are. Fern and I never have had the chance to raise a child together. We had opportunities too and we had tried things in the past but we were never successful,”

Fern and Isa would make wonderful parents, Jisung knows that. He had heard of infertility back in the intuition. That had been a thing the government had made sure they would not suffer from, by the artificially grown and controlled by hormone regulator implants.

“We love you, Jisung.” She smiles at him, gold eyes now shimmering with the blurriness of unshed tears. He looks at her, his own eyes open and wide and the itch of water brimming at the bottom of his eyes becomes apparent. “We are both old enough to be your mothers and our hearts have seemed to realised that too,”

Jisung had lost his mother eight years ago. She had once loved him, unconditionally but something had shifted and she had given him away— heartlessly sold him into a life of nothing but pain. Some of his friends had lost their mothers but instead of the way his mother had thrown him out, they had died, not able to stay with their children.

“That's what I've wanted to tell you for some time. That woman that gave birth to you— she does not deserve the title of being your mother,”

Jisung clutches her hand and smiles softly.

Isa strokes his cheek. "Your friends love you and if you are worried about them being hurt by... this new title of our relationship I can assure you they would be nothing short of happy. We do not have the same bond. We have spent countless hours together. We have cried together and laughed whereas the others are still intimidated by our titles of leaders,"

Jisung launches himself into Isa's embrace and she hugs him close. "So, you can be comforted that we love Eunbyul like our own blood. She came from you and that much was enough for us to first care for her in the first place,"

Jisung chuckles under his breath and gives Eunbyul's belly a tickle.

"Aren't you a lucky girl?" She giggles and grips at his cheeks. "Two grandmas!" Isa lets out a hearty laugh and picks Eunbyul up to her face and peppers her face with kisses.

"I am comforted," Jisung smiles at Isa. "That she is going to be in such caring and loving hands," and then he laughs. "And just a year ago I had no family. But I have my friends... a daughter and you both who accept me as your own? I thought all my life I was unlucky," Jisung murmurs. "Or was that all just a sacrifice for my future happiness?" His eyes fall and Isa shakes her head, her gentle fingers lifting his chin up.

"Those things you suffered will never be able to be reasoned for. It was not fair, not human what you went through. But you have found things that make you happy now and that is all,"

Fern and Minhø enter the room then. Jisung vaguely sees Minhø's eyes reddened but he doesn't comment on it. He wanders over to Eunbyul instead and takes her, wandering over to the plush chair where he then sits for a while, talking down to her as she coos back at him.

"I think Isa has finally asked you?"

"I have," Isa beams at her wife who grins equally as bright back at her.

"We will love her enough to fill any absence,"

"I know you will," Jisung murmurs. His heart hurts so much and when he cradles Eunbyul before he gives her back to Isa, Jisung remembers the first time she had moved inside him.

Minhø sticks close to him and it feels like that moment, the elder pressed close and his heartbeat racing inside him at the feeling. He recalls the first time he'd looked down and realised he couldn't see his feet, how she'd keep him up at night and how he had been reckless and weak enough to faint, causing her birth to come quicker.

That moment will never fade in his mind. All that fear of all that red and the slow, tired movements of her inside him.

Everything to her birth up until now feels precious. And it is because Jisung has never felt anything like this in his life for what he feels for such a tiny human.

He kisses the top of her head as she's passed on to Isa and when Minho and himself turn to leave, she begins to whine. Minho grips his hand, one hand gripping onto his hip as he presses his back to him. He forces him to walk away and when he hears her cry, Jisung shatters himself and he is more than grateful for Minho's warmth behind him, comforting and giving him that last bit of strength to leave her.

Back on the ship, he sits still, unsure of what to do with himself now that he doesn't have a baby in his arms constantly needing something. His heart feels like it's missing a piece, a big vital piece of it and the void hurts.

→

"You love him," Fern says as Minho folds Eunbyul's clothes into draws. He turns, his cheeks brightening but his gaze is cold, hard. Fern stares back at him and Minho breaks it off first.

"I am not saying it is a bad thing... unless you think it is yourself?"

“Why would I think loving someone is bad?” He grits out and she shrugs her shoulders, the purple blanket in her hands. “She likes that one. Playing with it too,”

She hadn't quite mastered the act of sitting up by herself yet but she had a wonderful time rolling around on the ground, the blanket caught in her chubby fists. “I'll leave it out then,” her fingertips dance over the stitching along the edges and Minhø flushes, knowing he had done that himself. He had pricked himself with the needle an embarrassing amount of times, but so had Jisung so it turned rather comical in the end.

Fond memories linger in these boxes, the stitches in his jacket.

“I don't want to hurt him.” Minhø finally grits out and Fern's eyes turn sad.

“Maybe he'd surprise you?” Minhø shrugs his shoulders. “I think you'd find yourself surprised, Minhø,”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Fern chuckles under her breath. “You give him comfort. Did you know that? When you're by his side it's like that wall he had crumbles, the one that he uses to protect himself I'm sure you get my meaning?”

Minhø gulps and his gaze lowers. “You are quite closed off yourself. And I do not need you to spill your life story to me, I don't ask anything of you. But you help him and I don't think you realise he helps you,”

Minho blinks softly at her. She smiles, green eyes vibrant. “When Jisung came here he was like a scared cat, running from everything and now,” she laughs softly and her hands clasp at her front. “He now knows so much more. That boy who struggled to know what his emotions were is not just a loving dad but he cares so much for you all.”

“I’ve seen it, too,” Minho whispers and Fern nods. “Of course you have. When you love someone you see everything. Those tiny changes... don’t doubt your feelings for him. Don’t give up on him, Minho. You are strong and I know you are quite a wild one yourself but you balance each other out,”

“Are you... are you saying you believe I have a chance with him?” Fern’s eyes twinkle and Minho’s throat constricts.

“If you show it to him, loud and clear I think he’ll finally realise his own feelings,”

Minho had shed tears only a few times in his life. When his mother passed, when he and Chan had to come back from the wild, when Eunbyul cried for the first time. Minho had stopped himself from shedding tears in quite a few situations— mostly regarding the keeper of his heart but this time, with Fern’s beliefs that his heart could be returned with a gift in turn of it Minho for some reason cannot stop them from falling.

“Is it just me or is the air suddenly really cold?” Changbin says with a whine and Hyunjin throws a blanket at him.

“It seems winter has finally decided to fall,” Chan smiles broadly and pats Jisung and Felix’s backs. “And you both are twenty now,”

They fall quiet for a bit.

“Aren’t we supposed to celebrate birthdays?” Changbin whispers out and Felix shrugs. “I don’t really care, do you Jisung?” He shrugs back and they seem to relax a bit.

Jisung’s been too caught up in trying to find things for himself to do in the ship without Eunbyul to care for the fact that his and Felix’s birthdays had come and gone.

“Guys,” Minho’s voice floats down the corridor from where he’s piloting the ship.

They all hurry towards him, awestruck at the spectacle in front of them. Snow is falling down hitting the wide window that stretches over the whole course of the control panel that spreads across from wall to wall. It sparkles in the soft blue light, early morning light that then creates a spell of shadows and light as the snow flies down to the ground.

“Wow,” Someone breathes out but Minho sighs. “Not the snow,” he says and then points a finger below, pointing to something on the horizon.

“A fire?” Chan squints his eyes and Jisung follows him, trying to peer closer to the smoke in the far background.

“Oh my god, that’s another settlement,” Felix mutters and Changbin shivers next to him. Jisung’s hand falls onto Minho’s shoulder and he looks up at him.

“We’re going to freeze our asses off when we get out...” Jisung mutters with horror and Hyunjin snorts. “This is like on giant ice cube...”

“Well, at least we brought extra jackets,” Seungmin laughs and Jisung cannot agree more.

“So what are the chances of this settlement killing us the moment they see us?” Chan sighs loudly and glares at Minho as he zips up his second jacket. It’s going to be nowhere near enough for what they’re about to step out into— a snowy mess and freezing wind.

Jisung really had made the right decision for Eunbyul to stay back

with her now adopted grandmothers. They had all found it terribly endearing when Jisung told them all what the two women had said and they all saw how it relaxed Jisung too.

“Is everyone confident in their running abilities?” Felix asks and Jisung can’t tell if he’s joking or not.

“I don’t have to carry a baby anymore so I’m pretty sure I can go a lot faster,” he answers back and Chan sighs. “It’s unlikely,” he tells them, always trying to defuse the situations they get themselves into.

“But if the unlikely becomes true, we run back for the ship. We have weapons... if they’re anything like Sunsen or Hava we have a great chance to win...” Chan says with a grimace. It was the truth though. Sunsen and Hava offered little military or manpower, but they had land, lots of it and enough hands to farm enough grain and crops to preserve for their ever-growing cause.

“Well then, I just hope we can get them on our side quicker than Sunsen,” Changbin grumbles. “Or else we’re going to freeze. Or maybe not make it back to the ship and get lost in a snow storm! Oh my god,” his eyes flash with panic. “What would we eat...?”

They’re all silent for a while and Jisung takes a step back, his arms crossing over his chest. “Oh cut it out you’re going to make us all anxious,” Felix gives him a slap over his head before he slams his fist against the button to open the doors.

He yelps as soon as the bitter cold air nips at his skin.

“Oh god I hope these people have warmer clothes to share around,” he murmurs before jumping out. The snow is just above his ankle and Felix scrunches his nose up in distaste.

“I didn’t think snow would be so... soggy...”

Jisung jumps with Felix and cocks his head at the blonde boy who is trying to flatten his hair over his ears to try to keep them warm. “You’ve never seen snow?”

Felix perks up and shakes his head. “It never snowed in the Capital?”

“Oh,” Jisung giggles and hooks their arms together. “It did in the slums, the further away from the wall, the colder it was,”

“That’s weird...” Felix sighs but then shrugs.

Minho had gone to the mechanics back in Mydar to get a functioning remote for the door so he didn’t have to throw himself out of closing doors each time they needed to shut it up. And if they’re in danger of potentially getting eaten, that would be a lot quicker to open and shut the doors than to hurriedly scanning his damn thumb on the pad. He presses the button and hums in satisfaction when they shut nicely.

“Everyone got their bags?” Chan asks and they lift them up and he

gives them all a thumbs up in return. “Well then, let's hope these guys are friendly,”

→

Waking in the snow enters Jisung's top ten uncomfortable adventures.

Of course, he had personally dealt with things much more uncomfortable, like walking around with his middle heavy and his back and feet aching, the time where he had almost become a victim to the ocean. He's had his fair share of uncomfortable journeys.

But the snow wets his pant legs each time he takes a step, the snow that has fallen on his nose is now wet and frozen solid. He and Felix cling together, hands clutched tightly in the others trying to keep warmth in.

“Okay, maybe I'm okay if they want to capture us as long as they have a heat source,” Changbin whines and Seungmin nods along with him, teeth chattering.

“Well,” Chan clears his throat and sniffs, his nose running from being out in the cold for so long. “I see a fire?”

“Good. But maybe we should have landed closer to the smoke signals...?” Jeongin suggests and Minho scoffs at him. “We’ve been walking for thirty minutes,” he deadpans. Jisung's not quite sure why he’s not as cold as the rest of him. Maybe it’s because he’s so hot-blooded that he feels the cold less than them and that brings a smile to his lips while he gazes down at his feet sinking into snowy sludge.

“Thirty minutes too long,” Hyunjin drawls out and Felix sighs and tugs on Jisung's hand, pulling him to walk with him closer to the smoke floating up to the sky.

“Do you think they use fires for heating and light here too?” Jisung asks him, his eyes wide and Felix can’t help but smile at him. He endlessly adores his friend and how his eyes now light up, cheeks still full and ever so inviting to just squish.

“Maybe,” he answers and pulls Jisung closer, trying to find warmth in his body heat. “I’m not expecting every settlement to be like Mydar. They’re very technological and I know the Great War destroyed a lot more than just cities,” he shrugs. “But I don’t mind. I think it’s really interesting to see how others live.”

They hear whining behind them, their friends yelling at them to slow down and wait for them but Jisung laughs and Felix rolls his eyes. “Then hurry up!” Jisung shouts back at them. “I can’t feel my nose anymore!”

Felix laughs with him, slapping at his arm before reaching out and flicking his nose. Jisung yelps and frown at him. “I was just checking,” the blonde laughs out and hugs him tightly in an apology.

But as they let go of their hug, the snapping of a twig underneath someone's shoe alerts them. Jisung clings onto his friend, suddenly regretting leaving their friends behind just those few steps.

“What was that?” Felix whispers lowly and Jisung takes a step backwards, taking Felix with him.

They hear Chan call out to them but before they can answer back there's a flash of bright blue and white flying between the trees. Felix's grip tightens on Jisung and they almost lose their footing if it hadn't been for the leg Jisung put all his weight onto.

Chan grips at Felix's arm, tugging him closer to him just as Minho grips Jisung's shoulder and yanks him to his chest. Pain flares up his shoulder and he hisses lightly and Minho tenses at that. “Did I hurt you?” He whispers and Jisung shakes his head, his eyes pinned where he had seen the flash last.

And then suddenly it's there again, closer and with a frightened yelp someone is standing in front of them.

Their coat is thick, the hood that's hanging off framed with thick fur and the flash of white Jisung had seen throughout the trees had been the stark blonde hair that's braided along the sides of their head, the rest falls beneath the coat that is sealed up to their throat. Most of the fur covers their face, concealing most of their features from them.

“People!” The voice is raspy but there's a certain sweetness to it. Bright blue eyes bare down at Jisung's warm brown ones as they tug at the fur of the hood with two heavily tattooed hands.

She's tall, shorter than Hyunjin Seungmin and maybe just under Chan. Jisung has never seen a person with a face similar to hers. Her nose is long, pointing out from her profile, dipping almost elegantly and her lips full. The corners of her mouth look lifted even when she rests her mouth. But it's the sliver ring clinging to her full bottom lip that catches his attention.

"Are you nomads?" She has an accent, but her speech is clear enough for them all to understand. Her eyes twinkle, bright and pure. She had to be around Jisung's age, her face clear from baby fat but she still held almost a child-like wonder to her.

"You look cold," she then frowns. She takes a step forwards and Jisung flinches, unknowingly clutching onto Minhoo's hand for comfort.

"Oh, I will not hurt you!" She raises her hands and bends down slowly. He's not quite sure why she crouches down, her chin to the snowy ground, but her blue eyes staying on them.

"We are searching for settlements," Chan speaks out, his voice raspy and rather dry. They hadn't really ever gotten ill on their journeys but being so stupidly unprepared for such cold weather had potentially already done its damage.

"Oh," she perks up, getting up from her crouch. "We have come to warn to the world and ask for their hand in return,"

Her eyes narrow then and she stalks forwards. “What news is so drastic?”

Chan slowly relaxes his grip on Felix. She didn’t seem like much of a threat, by the shining innocence in her eyes Chan had little to suspect her of. But that didn’t ease him all the way.

“There is a force building up,” Minho says and her eyes flicker to him, dark lashes fluttering as she blinks.

“My father... is the leader of all these nations here,” Felix shoots Jisung a look.

“I can take you to him,” She offers with a soft shrug. “Oh, would you?” Hyunjin breathes out, relieved. She looks apprehensive about it though. Her brows knit together as she thinks before she nods her head once.

“It is far. Could take two weeks to get there...”

“Is someone else with you? Someone that we could talk to before your father?” Seungmin asks gently.

Her face falls into a saddened expression and Jisung's brows knit.

“I was to be married to a warrior of my fathers best friends clan... I have not been home in weeks,”

“You ran away?” Jisung asks her softly and her eyes droop a little bit but she nods softly. “I did. I have shamed my family...”

“But you will return?” Jisung asks her again and she sighs deeply. “I do not have much of a choice either way. I would be found sooner than later and I am not brave enough like those nomads that wander from place to place,”

Jisung's eyes soften and for some odd reason, he just wants to give her a big hug. Maybe he was missing Eunbyul more than he thought? “What is your name?”

Her lips stretch into a smile. The ring on her lip presses into her skin, creating a small indent of where it tugs backwards. “My name is Valkyrie,”

“We have a ship? It could take maybe a day in that? Only if you’re comfortable to come back with us?”

“You are not bad men,” Valkyrie smiles at them and Chan stares at her softly. “If you were the spirits would’ve told the wind for me to run,” she lifts a finger and a small breeze drifts by and she giggles. “Safe.” She mumbles.

“I will come back with you. Take you to my father,” her eyes soften once more. Chan stretches out his hand and she beams, fitting her thinner hand against his. “But I have a condition. My father always said that there must be a reason for both parties to agree on.”

Valkyrie laughs softly under her breath.

“I do not wish to marry that man my father wants me to... but he will abstain if I claim marriage to one of you,”

Her blue eyes twinkle and the snow blends in with her hair.

“So... which one of you is willing to marry me?”

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Notes for the Chapter:

Hi I'm a Simp for Isa how r u? Also I've never seen snow can u tell LMAO there are only a few places in Australia where it actually snows but ive never been! Yet! Also the list of how many of my own characters I will do anything for will certainly rise.... AHHDJKSMAAAAAAAAAA just wait lol Valkyrie is definitely climbing up the ranks already

Also id just like to mention the ships in the tags! So hyunjin/jisung is tagged as well as jisung/felix and hyunjin/jeongin and all of these ships are platonic or at least endgame platonic. I know people wanted hyunin to happen butttt what they end up having is a very deep friendship which is very good for the both of them! it also wakes Hyunjin up from his confusion to distinguish between platonic love and romantic love lol. Sorry if u guys rlly wanted them to end up together but their relationship is still very cute and healthy!!

also ps Valkyrie ur so cool... I'm really enjoying
writing her too!!!

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The young woman beams at them, the ring on her bottom lip glinting in the reflected light from the bright snow by her feet.

Jisung stares at her, his mouth closed but his grip on Minho loosens completely.

Her smile falls though at the silence and staring. "Oh," her lips purse slightly. "Is the thought of marrying me that bad?" Valkyrie takes a soft step back.

"Of course... I shouldn't have asked such a demanding question..."

"No!" Chan shakes his hands at her almost frantically. If she didn't agree to come with them and did go back herself.... If problems arose with her father it wouldn't be good. "We were just shocked," he turns to the rest of them, eyes pleading.

Well, this was certainly not what any of them had expected to happen on this journey. They had expected to be captured, potentially tortured but... none of them were expecting a young girl asking to marry one of them.

"Ah of course we do not have to wed... properly," she tells them and Chan turns back. "We can get divorced as soon as possible..." her face falls at that thought and the bright light in her eyes dim the slightest bit but Jisung sees it all, the corners of her lips sinking downwards and how her fingers entwine with each other in anxiousness.

"This condition was certainly what we were expecting..." Changbin mumbles gently and Seungmin hums in agreement. "I apologise," Valkyrie whispers. "But there's nothing else I can offer. It is either the protection of our hands tying or I leave you to convince my father on your own... my father is not easily convincible. I have tried for almost a whole year to break my engagement..."

Minho's hand losses on Jisung and he goes to move forwards but Hyunjn captures his wrist and looks at him with something Jisung

can't quite understand. It's almost pleading, but knowing and his eyes flicker down to him and then back to Minho. The eldest tenses slightly and nods his head once, understanding the nonverbal communication. He settles back behind Jisung, his fingers gripping at his hip again.

"Ah..." Felix looks down at his feet. "But would your father allow marriage to an outlander?" Her smile appears again and she laughs softly. "It is our culture," she shrugs her shoulders. "My father can do nothing if I come back with a fiancé that shares love with me,"

"But..." Felix looks at her with widened eyes. "Ah..." She mutters back. "Is there a good actor perhaps? I am not asking for love but shelter from a marriage with this man," her shoulders square at the mention of him.

"I'll do it," Comes a steady voice.

Valkyrie's eyes light up at his voice and she waddles forwards, her boots trudging through the thick snow. Her pale hand reaches out and clutches at his much bigger palm.

"You have strong hands," She comments in a pleased tone. Both her hands clasp around his hands that have been worked for a good while. The skin around his fingernails is rough and dry, but his palms hold a certain softness that gives away that he had not worked hard his whole life.

She lets go of his hand and pats his shoulders, still smiling broadly. "And a pair of sturdy shoulders,"

Hyunjin's hand hesitantly lands on her shoulder, and instead of flinching or acting displeased by the action, her lips lift once more and she giggles.

"You have the hands of a healer," she comments softly and without warning, she brings his hand up once more and peppers a soft kiss against the skin of his back of his hand. Hyunjin freezes at that and Jisung gazes up at him with an amused smile at how his ears have flushed red.

The girl throws the hood over her head, concealing her face behind the thick fur. “Where is this ship of yours?”

Hyunjin peers down at Jisung and he smiles at him. The medic looks as if he’s regretting this already. He gives him a soft shrug and Hyunjin sighs.

“It is a bit of a walk to it,” Changbin tells her and she looks around at them all. “We must hurry then,” She pulls at the fur on her hood. “It is too cold to stand around in your type of clothing in these parts.”

Changbin inflates at that, hoping her words meant the further they went in, the less snow they’d have to deal with.

Valkyrie takes a step backwards from them and pulls her hood off and with nimble fingers, unbuttons her coat and pulls it off of her body. Her clothing underneath is unlike anything they had ever seen.

A white shirt lays beneath a leather tunic that clings to her chest. The straps are broad and rest on her shoulders and there are images etched into the hide that she wears. There’s a metal piece around her middle that shows off the dips and curves of her waist. The tip points upwards towards her breasts, and curves downwards to cling at her waist. A pouch sits at her hip and another larger leather pouch.

“It is unfair if wear my coat,” she mutters softly. Chan wants to tell her to put it back on but he just sighs.

“It’s this direction,”

It is obvious when their ship is in view that Valkyrie has never seen anything like it in her life.

She stops suddenly as they walk and Hyunjin almost walks into her as she gapes up at their ship.

“I must say I had something different in mind when you said ship,” she breathes out and Minho snorts at her voice, soft with awe.

Jisung stands next to her and peers up at her eyes taking in the ship.
“It is from a place called Mydar,”

“I have never heard of such a place,” she admits when she looks at him. Minhoo waltzes up and presses his thumb against the scanner and Valkyrie gasps and flies backwards when the doors begin to open.

“It’s okay!” Jisung tries to reassure her. “It’s just opening,”

Minhoo climbs up first and flicks the lights on. Valkyrie’s eyes shine.
“You do not use fire for light?”

“No. Electricity is Mydar’s specialty,” Jisung jumps up much easier than he has ever before, not having to worry about his daughter all the time. Hyunjin is next and he offers a hand to Valkyrie rather hesitantly. The young woman peers up at him, her brows knitted gently together.

She takes it and lets out a surprised sound when Hyunjin pulls her up. She doesn’t say anything until everyone is in and the doors are shutting.

“It is warm in here,” she muses and Felix takes her hand and pulls her to the lounge. Chan sighs at him and Jisung laughs but runs after him to talk to the newcomer as well.

“Hey,” Jeongin slides into Hyunjin's view. “Can we talk somewhere private for a bit?”

The older nods along, “Sure,” Jeongin trails off to his room and Hyunjin clicks the door shut behind him after he enters.

He looks up to him for a little while and Hyunjin begins to laugh.
“You look pretty serious right now...” he trails off and his face suddenly contorts with concern.

“Is something wrong?” Jeongin shakes his head at him and he breathes out, a soft smile appearing on his lips.

“I don't expect you to say much in return. But I want to say it. For myself and because hell I will never be as oblivious as Jisung,”

Hyunjin sucks on his bottom lip at that statement.

“What is it you want to say, then?”

“Just wait,” Jeongin reprimands him. “I hope you’re not too shocked and I don’t want you to feel stressed to make me upset because I’m not easy to upset,” he shrugs.

“I think I like you,” he finally breathes out.

Hyunjin swears he stops breathing for a few seconds.

“You like me?” Hyunjin stares at him with wide eyes and Jeongin hums softly under his breath. “Well... I think so. I don’t know what it is like to feel romantic love, but I think so,” the youngest drops his gaze. “I don’t expect anything to happen though... I don’t even know what I’m feeling is love like the books said,” he smiles up at him then. “I just wanted to let you know. So you can decide...”

“I...” Hyunjin’s voice cracks.

He suddenly then knows that this was exactly how Jisung has felt rejecting him. It feels as if he’s evil and he cannot stop the eventual inflict of pain he’ll cause. “I... I’m so sorry but I... you’re like a little brother to me. I never had siblings growing up, and when we first got out you were so young and small. I just...”

“I get it,” Jeongin just shrugs and Hyunjin stares at him. He’s taking this surprisingly very well and Hyunjin is surprised because when Jisung had said his feelings weren’t the same, he had collapsed, felt like his heart was ripped out of his ribcage. But Jeongin smiles and pats him on the shoulder.

“Don’t be awkward around me... okay? I’m really fine,”

Hyunjin doesn’t want to believe that but Jeongin is the most resilient person he has ever met. Things didn’t bother him for long and he doesn’t dwell on past occasions. Hyunjin wished he was more like him.

“Valkyrie is lovely,” Jeongin smiles and Hyunjin knows that is genuine. The taller scoffs at the youngest of their family. “We’re not

actually getting married,” Jeongin laughs and nods his head at him. He lets out a deep sigh and gives him one last smile. “But seriously don’t treat me any different. I will be fine,”

“Then I the same?” Jeongin nods at him. “I know you liked Jisung,” he pauses, his hand halting around the door handle. Hyunjin gulps.

“And I know that you’ve struggled with him not returning your feelings but... there will be someone that will make you feel something special. I... I am fine with you feeling like a brother to me because maybe I’m just young and confused myself? Maybe I’m just seeking the comfort of love like the others are seeking out?” He shrugs his shoulders.

“But once you find someone that makes your heart beat and your stomach swirl, cling onto that. Not onto something that is hopeless,” he gives him one last smile before leaving.

Hyunjin stares at the door for a while.

Maybe that’s all he wanted from Jisung? That comfort of love and affection? Like how Jeongin is confused with what his feelings are?

But his heart yearned for him but it will slowly disperse over time and Hyunjin just hopes that both Jeongin and Jisung are right. But how was he to tell if he truly likes someone in the future if took him this long to realise what they had wasn’t real, wasn’t good for either party?

Hyunjin is used to stitching up wounds, treating illness but in all his years of study they’d never taught him how to cure the pain of what love can cause.

→

Valkyrie fits into their odd circle well. It surprises them all. They were all so different from others they had come across in different settlements, always standing out somehow.

Everyone in their circle all played a part, added skillsets to their team. Each skill had helped them survive this long and Valkyrie had offered the moment she set foot into their ship to help. With one thing they have always lacked on their journeys, directions and the ability to track anything, even in the snow.

She knows the bends in the river to follow, the mountain peaks to head too and when they began to run short on meat in the ship she, Changbin and Hyunjin set out together and came back twenty minutes later with a haul to fill the freezer for some time. She had flown through the trees like the breeze itself, according to Hyunjin and Changbin who followed her blindly behind her.

And she brings them to the capital of her nation within four days. She had said it took her a whole two and a half weeks journey to the outskirts of the nation, right at the border when she had bumped into them and Chan and Minho were expecting a longer time since they all agreed on flying on the boarders instead of overhead the villages.

Her almost white hair is braided along the sides of her head, the light blonde hair on the top of her head is flowing against her skull, falling to her mid-back. Hyunjin who is standing next to her is running his fingertips over the braids on the left side of his head. She had gingerly asked that morning before they landed if she could do his hair. She explained to them while they sat together that it was a ritual marrying couples do and she wasn't comfortable with any holes in their little lie that her father could spot. Punishment would follow out if he did and she was not prepared for what punishments this settlement use.

The girl's boots crunch down in the snow when she hums from the ship, knees bent and she's low to the ground, almost like a mountain lion stalking its prey.

She reminds Jisung of Minho the slightest bit. That same almost predatory movement, the smoothness of their motion, the natural grace of their body lines. But Minho was cold, warm once he grew to know the person and protective, sarcastic and rather pessimistic at times. Valkyrie shared his likeness of movement but she is honest, prideful with sweet undertones. Her culture is heavily embedded in her, Jisung can tell that much even though he is unsure of what the

culture is.

They're both two very different people but there are little things that make him think of the other sometimes.

They have known Valkyrie for as little as four days but she had crept in, with that smile framed by a silver ring and silver hair that flutters by. She seems wise beyond her years and Jisung has already accepted her approach with friendship with both hands out.

They were calling Fern and Isa the second night after retrieving Valkyrie the afternoon before and the young girl's eyes had shifted from the young baby's face to Jisung's in an instant, beaming but Jisung knows the look of mild confusion in people's eyes when it comes to his little star.

He had cried shortly after turning off the call. He misses the weight of her in his arms, how she'd even wake him up when the stars were still shining high in the sky. Felix held him close while Valkyrie ran her fingers through his hair, comforting like Felix's warm hugs.

She doesn't talk a whole lot and keeps to herself most of the time. Jisung doesn't blame her, they were still all unknown men to her and it almost reminds him of their journey when they first broke out of the institution.

Minho lands beside her in such a similar stance to her that it makes Jisung smile even as the cold bites at his cheeks.

"It should be an hour's walk to the village's edge. Another hour riding on horseback to reach the Capital village," Jisung tenses at the mention of the word, but Chan's warm hand against his back is grounding.

Her eyes give her away that she's noticed but she doesn't press on it further. She just strides right next to Hyunjin and holds out her hand to him. He blinks at her and Minho nudges him in the ribs. "Take it," he whispers in a growl and the taller flushes red at the ears as he slips his much larger palm against hers.

"When we arrive even at the village, we must pretend. If not the

sentries there will report back to my father. They'll do anything to find holes and flaws into this,"

"I never took acting classes..." Hyunjin mutters and Minho groans as Changbin howls with laughter. "You will be fine," Jisung tells him and his eyes sparkle at that. Jeongin hums next to Jisung and nods. "You'll be great."

Valkyrie grips his hand tighter and leans closer to his larger frame.

"Can you fight?" She asks after they've been walking for around twenty minutes. She's stayed as close to Hyunjin as she possibly can and Hyunjin looks much more comfortable now than he did before. "That feels rather ominous coming from you," Hyunjin replies and the girl peers up at him, a frown marring between her delicate brows. He looks ahead and feels the braids along his head with his free hand. "I... yeah I can. Pretty well I guess,"

"That's good, then," Valkyrie mutters back and his eyes widen. "I don't have to like... fight against this man for your hand?"

She gazes up at him again. "It depends on how everyone takes it,"

Jeongin falls into step with Jisung and Minho who are chatting softly about Eunbyul together. Jisung grabs his hand quickly and Minho smiles at him. "Uhh... can I talk to Jisung?" Minho lets go of where he was holding onto Jisung's hip gently and smiles once more before running into Chan, tackling him to the ground.

"What's wrong, you never ask to speak alone?" Jisung gazes at him with concern and Jeongin sighs, linking their arms together. "After Valkyrie came and you know, asked for marriage I told Hyunjin I liked him," Jisung's eyes widen and he stops. "You like Hyunjin?" He hisses in a whisper and the youngest cringes. "He said he didn't feel the same. Which is only fair... I'm only like a little brother to him."

"Oh, Innie..."

"I'm fine, I truly am!" His brows then furrow at that. "But that's what is confusing me... People say when love isn't requited that it hurts a lot. But I'm oddly fine with him accepting me as a younger

brother?”

Jisung smiles softly and presses their foreheads together gently, although he has to reach up on his tiptoes. Jeongin has grown a fair amount in the time they've spent together. At one stage he was just taller than Jisung but now he's a fair amount taller than him. He can see how Hyunjin's feelings for him are like a pure younger brother love. He feels it for him too.

“We've been through a lot together. All of us. Our bonds are too tight I guess,” Jeongin leans into him and sighs softly. “I thought it would've hurt but I just feel lucky that I have you all,”

“And I'm sure if you asked us all we'd all say the same exact thing,” Jisung leans his head on the younger boy's shoulder. His eyes go to Changbin and Seungmin, holding hands as Seungmin points things out, like frosted plants and bends to check them out while Changbin gazes lovingly down at the younger man.

“We're a family one way or another,” Jisung tells him. “And that will be forever set in stone,”

→

The moment they set foot into the village people recognised Valkyrie just like she had feared. Her grip on Hyunjin's hand tightens as a woman runs up to her.

She says something to her in a language that Jisung hasn't heard before. He had only heard his tongue in his life, though so it doesn't come as a surprise when they speak.

Valkyrie speaks back in the foreign tongue, her hands gripping at the old woman's forearms to steady her at her obvious panic that shines through the language barrier. Hyunjin responds by snaking an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to his body. The old woman peers up at him and says something else to Valkyrie.

“What’s going on?” Felix mutters to Jisung but he shrugs and slips his hand into his best friend’s.

Valkyrie says something else to the woman that makes her repent and turn back with one last glance.

“What’s going on?” Hyunjin asks her. Her jaw clenches and touches his fingers that are gripping at her waist. “She tells me my father has been in a fit of rage ever since I left...”

“She didn’t just say that didn’t she?”

“You’re very perceptive,” Valkyrie muses gently, her hand curls around his hip. “She noticed you. Said my fiancé is out searching for me and that he won’t be happy when he comes back to see you,” Hyunjin gazes down at her.

“You made it seem there wasn’t going to be conflict?”

“There won’t be,” Valkyrie says boldly. “I can make sure of that,”

“That’s assuring,” Hyunjin sighs but he instead smiles down at her. “We have to make sure our story is foolproof then,”

“Of course,” Valkyrie agrees with a nod. “On my journey, I was injured and you healed me with those hands of yours. Which is handy because I did get injured shortly before I ran into you,” Hyunjin narrows his eyes at that. “And you didn’t think to say anything to a healer that was very close to you?” She shrugs. “It’s fine,”

“And we supposedly fell in love just like that?”

“No, of course not. Then we spend all our time together for two weeks, then we fall in love and now I can’t marry my fiancé because of you,”

“I feel like this is a disaster waiting to happen,” Hyunjin mumbles. “But okay... we’re very much in love then,”

“Do I need to know any customs... or anything?”

Her eyes shine. "You are a healer. That much will help you gain favour in the village. You can fight too? My father values warriors, too. You are strong and handsome, they will not question why I favour you over my fiancé," she tenses slightly but relaxes quickly. The more she talks about this fiancé of hers Hyunjin is growing increasingly suspicious of why she is so against marrying him. He doesn't dare ask yet though.

"The stables are right here," Valkyrie leads Hyunjin away to banter for horses while the rest of them stand together.

"I kind of have a bad feeling about this all," Felix murmurs gently and with a hesitant nod, Jisung agrees. "She says she won't allow conflict," Seungmin adds. "But I don't understand how she can stop a whole village that's angry..."

"If she is so confident shouldn't we at least have some faith in her?" Minho pipes up and Chan raises a brow at him with his optimistic approach. "I mean, there's a culture we need to take into consideration... and she's the leader's daughter she must have some authority over them all?"

"I think we can trust her," Jeongin pipes up. "She doesn't have any other motives as far as what I can tell except trying to get out of this engagement,"

"But the other question is why she wants to get out of it so bad, as well?" Seungmin mumbles and Felix cocks his head to the side. "Maybe that's something we shouldn't pry into?"

"But we're involved now too?" Jisung grips Felix's hand. "Hyunjin's involved now," he corrects. "We might be one team but this is going to affect Hyunjin more than anyone else,"

"Right," Seungmin smiles and nods his head just as the woman wanders from the wooden log stables, holding the reigns of two horses in one hand, one in her other hand and Hyunjin follows behind with two mares, both with silky black coats.

"Five horses between nine?" Minho questions softly and Valkyrie nods. "I cannot just take all the horses in this one stable? Other

people may need them. Our horses are bred strong, they can carry two people just fine.”

She passes the three reins to Chan, Minhø and Seungmin who stares up at the beast with a hint of fear.

“Don’t be scared, Minnie,” Jeongin rushes over and takes the sandy horses reins instead.

“And you,” Valkyries eyes narrow up at Hyunjin with a sly smile. “You’re with me,”

“Of course,” He mumbles with what Jisung is sure is feigned annoyance. Valkyrie had grown on them all, even Hyunjin who at one point was definitely the weariest and nervous around her—despite his sacrifice to help her out—has grown comfortable enough to joke around with her. She gives off that feeling, one that makes you feel at ease almost, similar to the way Chan always calms and eases nerves.

“I’ve never been on a horse before,” Jisung whispers to Felix who nods his head at him. “Me either,” he whispers back and then hurries off to Chan with a wave. Jisung pouts and turns to Minhø behind him. “Chan’s hogging my best friend,” Minhø snorts at him as he hoists himself up onto their horse, one of the black ones Hyunjin had led out.

“They’re in love,” Minhø rolls his eyes. “Sickening,” he screws up his nose and Jisung laughs at him. “Put your foot in the stirrup,” Jisung stretches his neck to look up at him sitting high on the horse. Jisung pats the horse’s nose gently, flinching and then laughing as it snorts.

“Here grab my hand, too I’ll pull you up,”

Jisung puts his hands on his hips and frowns at him. “What makes you think I can’t do it myself?” Minhø laughs at him and retracts his hand. “Well, if you’re so confident, do it.” Jisung huffs too and puts his foot in the stirrup. He hoists himself up from there, feet of the ground and he throws an arm over Minhø’s lap, his fingers clinging to the sides of the saddle. That’s when he gets stuck.

He heaves out as he tries to pull himself up, both trying to avoid kicking Minhø in the face and falling to the snowy sludge beneath.

“It’s harder than what it looks, isn’t it?” Minhø laughs at him and Jisung wants to hit him. “Just help me up!” Minhø cackles and throws his head back, but he does as he’s asked and pulls him to the front of the saddle.

“Next time let me help you get up,” he whispers in Jisung’s ear. His breath is warm against the shell of his ear and it sends the hair on his arms upright, a warm coil in his belly suddenly appearing. He clears his throat, his cheeks much warmer from the rush of blood, but his skin feels almost frozen to the touch. “I’ve ridden horses since I was five,” he whispers again and this time Jisung wiggles forwards, biting on his lips.

“I’ll remember,” he whispers, gazing down at his hands.

Over the ride that takes just over an hour to reach the capital village, Jisung admires how the mountains fade into the distance slightly, how the rives freeze at the shores, but the raging middle waters rush down, full of salmon. The wooden log houses turn taller, built up with sometimes three stories from what he can count.

The name of this place, Scalva they had just learnt as Valkyrie had finally remembered that important detail.

Scalva is bigger than Mydar and the other two colonies by quite a lot. It occupies a whole strip of land from coast to an ice bridge bigger than even the Capital and all its slums combined. The people that had seen along the way look healthy, able to fight or offer helpful aid in what they might need. The sheer number of people here gives them enough hope that they might not be weak on manpower. The first two settlements weren’t big at all, still helpful in their own ways but Jisung worried about how many people they’d eventually end up with fighting with them.

But if they can somehow convince Scalva that this cause is good enough to support, they would gain a lot from this ally.

As they reach the centre of the town, Jisung stares in awe at the massive rock craved into a sword in the ground. Icicles drip down

from its hilt and glitter in the sun, making it seem like it's shining like a real metal sword.

"Do you think they're a settlement of warriors?" Jisung asks Minho and he nods. "Haven't you seen the size of some of these people, either?" He had. Many people with broad shoulders and backs, legs thick with muscle. "Strength," Jisung mutters. "We need that,"

A shout is heard then and Valkyrie's name is screamed over the crowd's noise. The girl at the front leading them straightens up and Jisung sees how her hand grips at Hyunjin's right away. Something else is shouted in their native tongue and an elderly woman hobbles in front of her horse, pointing a finger at her.

Valkyrie hisses something back to her which the woman's eyes widen at and stomps her foot, then pointing to the ground. Valkyrie says something else and the woman closes her mouth and says something short calmly. Valkyrie shrugs and nudges Hyunjin.

"Get off the horse and help me down," She hisses and Hyunjin quickly does as he's asked. He reaches a hand for her to take which she does with a bright smile. His free hand wraps around her waist as he helps her down. Her feet hit the ground she takes his hands and holds them out to the woman who is in front of them.

"Grandmother," Valkyrie mutters. The old woman eyes her and purses her lips, the two rings on her lips shining.

"A healer," She says in a heavy accent. Her eyes pierce Hyunjin's and he almost gulps. "You are young to have such wise hands," her wrinkled finger travels around the lines of his palm. "The wind does not object?" She looks to Valkyrie who gazes up at Hyunjin, eyes sparkling and back to her grandmother. "The wind sends her blessings,"

"Come," the old woman grips around Hyunjin's wrist. "We must give your father piece of mind and notify him of your hearts lead,"

"What about our friends?" Hyunjin speaks for the first time and the woman turns back, eyes peering at the figures on the horses. "Get them inside and find them some good coats! Now!" Three men

wearing furs step towards them. A man with pitch black hair, unbraided steps forwards and holds out a hand to Jisung. He hesitates for a few moments and just as Minho jumps off to offer his hand instead, he's taken the larger mans hand and is swept off the horse.

"Thank you," He murmurs. "This way," he gestures with his hands. Jisung looks back at Minho, reaching for the elders hand to hold.

→

"Look who has decided to follow the winds calls home!" Valkyrie's grandmother shouts as she walks into the large house. Shuffling is heard somewhere, heavy footsteps and suddenly a giant of a man is standing in the doorway. His hair is light, not as light as Valkyrie's and his eyes show his age, crows feet crinkling by them.

"My daughter," He breathes out. His blue eyes are wide and Hyunjin sees him swallow thickly in his throat. He is easily a head and a half taller than Hyunjin, wider than anyone he's ever seen. He rushes forwards, the long blonde curls of his hair swishing as he makes his way to his daughter.

She's swept up into his arms, her feet dangling as he holds her tight. He whispers something to her in their language, something meaningful because her grandmother snuffles and brushes a tear from her eye.

"Papa, Papa," Valkyrie somehow escapes his embrace and takes a step back. She hits Hyunjin's chest and his hand gently rests on her hip that presses at his thigh. Hyunjin watches carefully as his eyes take him in.

His jaw clenches, eyes harden and he takes a step forwards. "You come back with another man?" He speaks just above a whisper and it's oddly threatening.

"You once said to me Papa, that if I want something I must push for it and never give up,"

He blinks at her. "My darling, you remember that?" Her smile is sad and her eyes dim the slightest bit. "I had told you over and over again I did not wish to marry Bjarne."

"My daughter, he will make a good husband, he is strong and he—"

"No." She shakes her head. "He will not. But he," she meets Hyunjin's eyes and Hyunjin is captivated in the way they shine, how bright they are. "This man who has my heart, he will make a wonderful husband,"

"You are engaged," He tells her and she shrugs. "I am yet to be tied down," she grips Hyunjin's hand tight. "I will marry no one else," she states with her head held high.

"You," His eyes narrow at Hyunjin. "My daughter comes in with a new man when she was to wed this week, not only that but an outlander at that. Marriage is a sacred union meant for love—"

"Papa, I do not love Bjarne! I never will!" She screams at him.

"But you love this man! I do not believe it!" He screams back and Valkyrie crashes against Hyunjin's chest. He catches her around the waist as a tremor goes through her body. "I love him, Papa,"

"I love her, sir," Hyunjin speaks up. "I may be an outlander, someone you do not trust. But I love your daughter very much,"

"For how long?" He grits out.

They both hesitate.

"I said for how long!" He yells again and she shakes again. Her hand clamps down onto Hyunjin's. His heart sinks in his chest in realisation.

"Two weeks," Valkyrie replies. Her voice shakes the slightest bit.

"Two weeks..." he mutters. "Girl, have you lost your mind?"

"If you do not accept I will just have to leave to his nation," she threatens and Hyunjin sees his face fall. "No," He whispers and he reaches for her wrist.

"Papa, you have never not believed me... why start now?"

"I do not hold all the power over your engagement... and your man here... I am afraid Bjarne is very fond of you and will not let you go so easily,"

"The boy is a healer," Valkyrie's grandmother speaks for the first time in a while. She hobbles over, grabs his hand and shows the leader.

He peers at his palm and Hyunjin's feet shuffle in uncertainty. Valkyrie grips his hand harder for comfort.

"Hands so wise at such a young age..." he stands up straight and looks at Hyunjin. "What is your name? Where do you hail from?"

"My name is Hyunjin. Hwang Hyunjin. I hail from..." his eyes blink slowly and he hesitates. "A place they call the Capital," Valkyrie is surprised but does her best to show it. Her father misses it. They hadn't gotten around to tell Valkyrie their whole story. Maybe in fear, she would then refuse to help them out, but Hyunjin knows she wouldn't do something like that. He raises a brow. "You do not have links with them now?"

"Ah... well no. But I wouldn't say I am a nomad. This place called Mydar, my family and I resided there for quite some time before we started this journey."

"I have not heard of such places before..." he hums and drops his hand. A gust of wind blows and the man chuckles. "I believe the wind blesses you?" Hyunjin just smiles, unsure of its meaning.

"Your family are here too?" Hyunjin nods. "Although our family isn't like the typical family... but we are one."

"Bring them," He suddenly says. "Then should we discuss a way for you to win my daughters hand against Bjarne?"



“What do you mean we have to help you win Valkyrie’s hand over this Bjarne dude?” Minho hurriedly asks as they stride through the snow. “I don’t know. This is all rather vague but I’m getting a clear message from Valkyrie that Bjarne is not a good dude,” Hyunjin cries back. “I’m fucking stressed, though, that’s for sure.”

“Hey, it’ll all be good... if you have to physically fight him... just knock him out!” Felix says and Hyunjin groans. “Not as easy as you think, Lix,” Chan whispers to him. “Oh,”

“Valkyrie and I met on the road. She was injured and I healed her, the rest is history. If he asks anything else just... try to not make me sound like an idiot,”

“That’ll be difficult,” Seungmin jokes and Hyunjin punches him in the shoulder. “I said you are my family... so there’s that but we should try to fit in why we’re actually here... I believe he’ll want to know sooner rather than later,”

They enter the house again and Valkyrie is by Hyunjin’s side as soon as the door opens. “Let me do the majority of the talking,”

“That’ll be suspicious,” Hyunjin disagrees. “I am to be your wife. My word means a lot,” Hyunjin blinks and just nods. He doesn’t fully understand their customs, so he’d rather leave it to her anyway instead he said the wrong thing or insulted them by accident.

“Ah... your family is a group of young men?” Hyunjin laughs. “I guess so,”

“Come, sit. My name is Odin Gulljord are to talk about Hyunjin and Valkyrie’s want for marriage. Does his family object?”

It's silent for a little bit before Chan speaks up. "No. Not at all. I am very pleased to see them both so happy together,"

"Wonderful. I was sceptical at first," Hyunjin deflates a little bit and Valkyrie moves to be closer to him. "But I have never seen such a pair of wise hands belonging to such a young person..."

"He has talent," Jisung speaks up. "He has saved lives before. Mine and my child's included," The man's eyes flicker to Hyunjin. He smiles gently at him.

"You are a healer," he looks to Valkyrie. "Bjarne is a warrior," She tenses. "If he asks of a duel I would be dishonouring the world to put a man like you into a fighting pit. Raw healing talent is magic... and we do not sacrifice that around here," Valkyrie seems relived too now.

"I can cancel the engagement on our side, but Bjarne's side must accept it too before you two can be wed."

"You approve, Papa?" He laughs and nods his head. "He is handsome! And a great healer. Together I am sure you will make a great pair," Valkyrie blinks and then turns to Hyunjin, buries her head in his chest and begins to cry to everyone's surprise.

"My Darling?" Her father steps over, stroking her head. Hyunjin just holds her close. "It's okay, he said yes." He mutters. "Soon we can marry,"

She pulls away but stays close. "I am fine. I was just overjoyed then," to Hyunjin he knows she's relieved and she looks like she is free of a heavy burden.

"But we did not come here for Hyunjin and Valkyrie to marry," Jisung says. "Before they even met, we were coming for something else."

Odin stands, looming over him in a way that makes Jisung want to shrink back. But he's never been one to submit so easily and now he straightens his spine and stands himself. Odin towers over him but Jisung doesn't hesitate this time.

“There is a war coming,” he speaks.

Odin takes a single step back. “On whom?” He grits out, his voice is suddenly hostile. Chan stands and grabs Jisung’s forearm.

“The world,” Jisung replies. Valkyrie suddenly stands, her eyes wide and horror shines in them. “You did not say it was so...”

“Valkyrie...” Hyunjin whispers. “We couldn’t take the risk...” she bites down on her lip and gazes at her feet. “I understand,” she murmurs.

“What war!” Odin then roars. “You cannot just come in, speak of a war and not tell us what it is about!”

“It’s about human greed, what else would it be over? Every single war history has recorded it was because mankind are greedy and horrible beings,” Jisung spits out.

“But you want to know in detail?” His voice softens, his face falling from its sharp and hard expression. Odin purses his lips, the two rings pressing up onto his upper lip. “Speak,”

Jisung walks to the middle of the room, looks at Felix and Chan who both nod. This is his time to explain in detail, not Chan’s or Minho’s.

“I was eleven when the corruption of our,” he gestures to all his friends. “government failed me. My parents failed me,”

Jisung has come to tell this story a few times now but every time he tells it, the look of horror that casts over people’s gazes bores deep into him. He thinks of how horrified they look at just his story and something burns deep inside of him to know that his story didn’t just have that effect but that he has lived to tell it. All those horrors, yet he has survived.

“So we must fight or the world will turn to ruin once more,” he ends with. Odin is staring at him in horror and shock, Valkyrie has a soft frown between her brows, but her eyes are swimming with emotion and the quiet granny in the corner is frozen in horror.

“We must fight, Odin,” she finally whispers. The leader of Scalva turns to her, blue eyes strong once more.

“Of course, mother...” he turns back to Jisung and stands. “We are a nation of mighty men and women. We can fight, create weapons, do anything to stop the world from ruin,”

Minho settles beside Jisung, first squeezing his hand to say he did a good job, then to say, “I’m afraid to tell you that the weapons you wield will be hopeless against our enemy...”

“Guns and bombs are no matches for swords and axes,” Jeongin adds.

“We will get you in contact with our leaders after we gather more allies,” Jisung promises. “We have time before we believe they’ll strike. A year or two at most...”

“I believe we can be useful in battle if you let me train our warriors,” Valkyrie speaks up. Her eyes are clenched shut, fists balled by her sides. She’s nervous.

Odin narrows his eyes at his daughter and Jisung cocks his head at her.

“I can teach them how to use a gun,” Hyunjin looks down at her with a frown. Everyone seems suddenly confused.

“Mother... taught me,” she whispers. Odin freezes for a split second. He parts his lips and nods. “You do that, then...”

Suddenly the door crashes open and footsteps echo through the home.

“Jarl Odin!” A shout comes. The leader's eyes flash and he looks to Valkyrie.

“Jarl Odin,” the door creaks open and a tall man, broad in the shoulders with long brown hair, the left side hanging down in plaits stands in the doorway.

“Valkyrie?” He eyes her down and Hyunjin shifts slightly in front of her. She hasn’t moved since she heard his voice call.

“It seems my daughter has come back on her own terms, Hersir

Bjarne,”

“Ah,” he mumbles. “I see I have interrupted a meeting between... nomads?” He looks to Valkyrie and steps in, walking towards her. “You were gone for a long time, my love.” He murmurs. “Come speak with me,”

“No,” she whispers back.

“Hm?” He then whispers something in their tongue, quiet enough so it only reaches Valkyrie’s and Hyunjin’s ears.

“She said no,” he steps in front of her, hiding her frozen figure. Bjarne is taller than him, clearly older than him, stronger but they haven’t seen this side of Valkyrie before and it’s unsettling.

“She is to be my wife,” Bjarne laughs at him. His eyes turn cold. “Get out of the way,”

“I think not,” Hyunjin murmurs lowly to him. “I can see why she doesn’t want to marry you so much. Luckily the fates saved her and brought her to me instead,”

Bjarne laughs. “What nonsense are you talking about? I treat her well. I will be her husband in a few days—“

“I am not marrying you, Bjarne. I’m marrying him,” the warrior's eyes flicker and his jaw tenses. “What?”

He turns to Odin who nods once.

“I cannot allow my daughter to marry if she is against it. She is precious to me,”

“And you’re going to let this boy marry her instead?” Bjarne spits out. His knuckles are white and his muscles are tense. “She loves him and he loves her. What more can we ask of them?”

“No,” Bjarne grits out. “We will fight then. A duel—“

“He is a healer!” Valkyrie’s grandmother shouts. “You will not lay a finger on him. Raw magic flows in him,” Bjarne growls and looks

around the room. His eyes land on Jisung and then back to Hyunjin. He storms out with heavy footsteps.

“That went better than I expected...” Changbin whispers but Odin shakes his head. Valkyrie’s breathing picks up.

“He is a broken braided man,” Odin speaks. “He may not duel you because your talents are too great to sacrifice to a death battle... but he can take something dear to you,”

Panic rushed through the room then and Bjarne reenters the room, an extra fur in his hands.

“No!” Minho rushes forwards but he is no match physically for Bjarne to get past.

He snatches Jisung in the fur and hoists him over his shoulder. Jisung yells and kicks at him, but a single knock over the head with the hilt of his blade knocks him out. “Take from me again and you’ll start something you can’t finish,” Bjarne warns in a growl.

He rushes out of the room with him. The seven of them rush for Jisung but Odin steps in front of them, blocking the door.

“Why didn’t you stop him!” Minho shouts. He rips his way through the crowd, but Odin pushes him back. He seethes and tries to lunge again.

“Stop! There is nothing I could do. To get in front of him then, he could kill anyone of you. If you try to get him back, you will all die,” he looks to Valkyrie.

“There’s one way you can get him back,” Valkyrie tells them. Her words are shaky and her fingers tremble.

“Send me to him,”

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for the late update!! My laptop has completely broken fuck her but I'm not getting it fixed bc it's too expensive and I do not have the money to do that haaaa.... I'm not sure about Sunday's update since I haven't got my new set up ready (I have solutions!!) I finished this chapter on my iPad that I used to use for digital art lol and it's so uncomfortable to write like that sooo definitely need a keyboard it's much more efficient!

This chapter is long! And I know people are unsure about Valkyrie and her situation etc but give her a chance!

Coming back to Hyunjin x Valkyrie I know people are probs like ••what r u doing? BUT i think how realistic is it that they'll all end up couples out of the group of eight... like... if u have a friend group of eight some might be couples and others are very close but not romantic lol I'm rambling again but also bringing in new characters and chances for them is exciting! Anyways they be cute and Valkyrie I love u miss ma'am!

(Bjarne ur a dick!)

Ah also if u didn't catch it Scalva is based of Scandinavia, more so Norway! Valkyrie's name comes from the Norse mythology. Bjarne means bear lol and Odin is the king of gods in Norse mythology!

Notes for the Chapter:

! Intention of/suggested SA, description of graphic violence, mentions of murder!

Although the warnings are pretty full on this chapter isn't a super dark one its just a little bit heavier than others but its not all bad!!

"You're scared of him," Odin finally concludes. "My darling what has he done to you that you have not told me?"

"It is a story that will take an evening to tell," she concludes with a breath. Odin shrugs off his furs, revealing dark patterns drawn over his skin. He points to something on his arm, a vague gesture to them but Valkyrie sucks in a deep breath and nods once. Odin's eyes shake and he bounds her tightly in his arms.

"I can send someone else—" he begins but Valkyrie breaks free and shakes her head. "No. I am the one the wants, no one else will be able to convince him."

"I don't mean to overstep any boundaries," Minho growls. "But if you don't hurry up what will happen to Jisung? What if he hurts him?"

Odin keeps quiet.

"I will go too, then." Hyunjin voices up. Valkyrie shakes her head wildly but he catches her wrist gently, a thumb pressing over the delicate skin of her pulse. "You said he cannot hurt me,"

"He might try," Valkyrie whispers. "He's like that,"

"But he is aware of the law of Scalva," Odin reminds her. "I will take you both back and if he tries to harm either of you I will consider that harm to myself,"

"We are not married yet and Jisung doesn't have—" Hyunjin shakes his head, cutting her off gently. "Our bonds are as deep as bottomless

rivers,”

“There is only one way we can allow that, how others will allow it.” The old woman speaks up. Valkyrie’s eyes sparkle in realisation. “A blood oath?” Her grandmother hums.

“If you get to Jisung first, and do a blood oath, Bjarne will be hopeless to your protection over us,”

“But first,” Odin clears his throat. “You must wed. Bjarne has accepted the breaking of your engagement by taking him. We will wed you at first light,”

Minho grips Odin by his shoulder. “He has Jisung we can’t wait that long! What if he’s hurting him?”

“Then he gets banished when we rescue him,” Valkyrie murmurs in a low tone. “Out in the wild with nothing but his shift to survive. Snow lions roam the wild of the banished...” Felix gulps and grabs Jeongin’s hand. It’s an unforgiving punishment. Sending someone out in clothes to freeze into predator infested lands. Minho isn’t quite sure if it’s merciful that they could freeze before they get eaten or if it adds to the fear of knowing just what could be ahead of them.

“Then we marry tomorrow morning,” Valkyrie finishes. “And we get him out in the dark after the ceremony is completed,”

Minho wants to protest, say that they can’t wait that long because it’s Jisung and he will not be able to live with himself if anything bad comes to harm him. But he cannot because it is decided.

Jisung is a warrior hidden beneath a thin skin. He just has to hope that will keep him going until they can get him out.

→

His head throbs as he comes to, his brain racks against his skull and moving his heavy body feels like a chore—like after the birth of Eunbyul when he had been dangerously anaemic. The thought of his daughter sends his heart tumbling but at the sudden shifting of weight, the dipping and spring back of the mattress beneath him, he scrambles back, entering fight or flight mode.

He recalls what had just happened, the fury on Bjarne's face as he had thrown him over his shoulder, the impact of the blade's hilt against his skull that didn't last long but the aftermath is now causing his throbbing headache.

Warm firelight brings Bjarne's face into view. His gaze is hard, almost emotionless but there's this odd crazed look in his eyes. The furs beneath his bare arms are soft, warm from his own body heat. Night has fallen, the open curtain behind Bjarne tells him of this, the moon a slithered, silver crescent in the sky. They had arrived a few hours after midday. Jisung had learnt of clocks and time telling back in Mydar, but he was useless to read the night skies for time. He had been asleep when he was young, and he'd been locked up and disconnected to most things to care about telling the time by the sky during nightfall.

"My friends will come and get me," he grits out between his teeth.

"Maybe," Bjarne answers back. He shifts his body, closer and Jisung flinches back at his movement. Some sick smile fills his face. Valkyrie is scared of him, he was capable of things that would create fear of him.

He stands to his full height, looms over him. A shadow falls over them and Jisung tenses and just as he tries to leap off the bed, a hand wraps around his throat. His fingers cling at the thicker digits around his neck and he gasps for air, unable to get any in while a crazed smile takes over the older man's face.

"Do you know why I took you instead of any of your other friends?" Jisung fights with the rest of his body to be let free. His knee hits his groin and with a huff, he's thrown, his air away clear from

obstruction. He scrambles off the bed, to the wall and he rips the candle holder from the wooden wall, just nailed it. Bjarne cocks his head at him.

“You lead them of some sort. But so frail,” he walks closer and Jisung holds out the candle holder out to try to protect himself. “They seek to protect you.” He breathes in heavily. “But they cannot protect you here,”

“I do not need protection,” Jisung hisses. It’s probably not the best thing to say while he’s being held hostage but Jisung has never quite been able to master the art of keeping his tongue still and filter his words.

“Perhaps you can. Against a man your friends' size, smaller than I?” Jisung hesitates. He couldn’t beat Minho, who is bigger than himself but lacked the height and width of these men of Scalva.

“I took you to restore my honour. My wife to be has been taken by another man,” he hisses out. “I must keep my braids to become general of the highest rank. So you will do fine for now.” His brows furrow. “Do not worry,” he says in a hiss. “I am not fond of marrying men. They cannot give me heirs,” Jisung doesn’t dare say anything.

Bjarne rips the candle holder from his hands. “Get out of my sight,”

He doesn’t waste a second to run. There is a room off of the bedroom, a hearth and a single chair occupied by a large battle axe. He freezes, the sharp blade glittering in the firelight. He decides to curl up near the hearth, wrapping the furs around him.

All he has to do was keep quiet, stay out of his sight until his friends come.

He doesn’t sleep that night, instead, he stares at that battle axe in the chair.

→

In the morning the village has transformed. Frosted blossoms hang from rooftops, purple and blue ribbons connecting roofs, drooping down and the sword in the village centre is covered in ribbons and frosted flowers too.

At the sword's base, a single table and golden bowl full of water infused with the scents of pine and sage sits alone.

Hyunjin turns to Chan. "For some reason, I had thought I wouldn't be marrying her, but stay engaged as we journey on." Chan pats his friend's shoulder and touches his braids gently. "Perhaps it is better this way? More set in concrete... and Odin really likes you."

"Because I'm a doctor," Hyunjin sighs. "I'd take it," Jeongin muses from his bed where he's just woken up. "Saves you from being thrown into a death pit with Bjarne," Hyunjin huffs at him and Chan laughs at the youngest.

"Look, Hyunjin. This has probably turned out much better than we had really expected. Not only did Odin agree to go to war with us, but he also seeks glory for his nation. I have little doubt they won't be seasoned warriors by the time we need to fight the Capital,"

"And they have manpower... I know you don't love Valkyrie and I get that it's hard... but on the good side... you have a father-in-law that's a war chief. A leader of the biggest settlement we've seen so far," Chan pats his shoulder and stands him up, draping the thick white fur over his shoulders. It adds to the width of them, making him appear broader than he is beneath them.

"It was always a marriage for convenience, I know," Hyunjin replies. "I just..." His cheeks flush red and he leans into his friend's ear, "I don't know if she expects me to seal our marriage,"

Chan pats his biceps fondly. "You don't have to do anything you are not comfortable with. I am sure she will understand. And perhaps it is not a marriage tradition in Scalva?" Hyunjin gulps and adjusts the furs on his shoulders. "Do I look okay? God, I didn't think this journey would entail me getting married of all things,"

Jeongin laughs softly and Chan embraces his friend. "I am glad it is with Valkyrie," Jeongin speaks up. "She is a good woman," His smile is genuine and even after their talk before he looks truly glad. Hyunjin smiles back and hums. "I too,"

He turns back to Chan. "Okay." He breaths heavily. "Let's hope time goes quick..."

Hyunjin shifts from foot to foot at the altarpiece. The wedding crowd has gathered and most of the people of the village, if not all are gathered in the centre to witness the ceremony.

Odin is standing off to his left, arms crossed over his thick chest.

The priestess arrives at the altar, behind the golden bowl, a single knife in her hand. She's dressed in dark black furs, her pitch-black hair free and curling down her back. The knives blade gleams in her hand and draws Hyunjin's eye to it.

The six of them are standing in the front, all huddled together and all looking both reassuring on the outside but their eyes give them away that they're impatient, almost frantic.

Valkyrie had gone over everything the wedding ceremony would entail late last night. Hyunjin knows what is expected of him and what he must do for it to be a successful ceremony.

She comes from the woods off to the left of the sword, where a gap in the ribbons is. A shadow of white, a group of women draped in grey furs and unbound hair, white veils over their own heads— the group of unmarried women to see a sister off. They circle her as they walk closer, drums bang in a deep beat, similar to a heartbeat.

Hyunjin is to come forward before she reaches the sword and as tradition goes, swing her over the rocks below their feet to the golden bowl. He does just that. The girls part and she's standing there, hair braided— the style of married women and men, white furs like his own over her shoulders. That silver corset she had worn the day they met is traded in for a golden one with a shining blue jewel where her

navel would be. A layered skirt of white falls past her bare feet. The day is cold and Hyunjin just knows she probably can't feel her feet at this moment.

He hoists her up, an arm around her waist. Her hands grip the fur at his shoulders and gently he puts her back to her feet. The muscles in her back tense as her feet touch the freezing rock. His arm falls back to his side and he takes three steps to his place on the other side of the bowl.

The priestess speaks something in their native tongue.

"The blood of two, the breath of the wind, two souls. One link, the blood of one." Valkyrie didn't want to leave them in the dark and told the seven of them the translation of what was said at weddings.

"A wife of the snow," the priestess speaks in their common language. "A husband of the lands beyond," Valkyrie lays her palm out and Hyunjin follows. Their fingers intertwine, her thinner paler fingers tucked between his warmer ones.

"Blood flows from the heart, down the body, wounds will close with the mingling of two bloodlines," that blade is lifted in her hand and Hyunjin doesn't dare flinch as it slides below his palm. Valkyrie only hisses lightly and grips his hand, squeezing it and his hers. Their blood flows down their forearms, dripping down their elbows where it pools before dropping into the blow of scented water below.

A ribbon is tied around their wrists, binding their two hands together. She steps in front of the bowl first but Hyunjin follows quickly. With their hands still up Valkyrie stares up at his eyes.

"A husband and wife," The priestess declares. The crowd erupts into cheers.

Valkyrie's lips twitch the slightest and she grips his forearms with her free arm. "You are meant to kiss me now,"

"I know," Hyunjin whispers back before he leans down and with a soft breath, his lips land on hers, warm and sweet.

She shifts closer to him, leaning in and Hyunjin wants to pull back,

but she kisses him softer, her velvety lips brushing over his.

It's not like how it was when Hyunjin kissed Jisung all those months ago. He had been lustful then, stupid in his own youth. He has only kissed Jisung and now Valkyrie and the way her lips mould against his mouth feels different from the kisses he'd steal from Jisung. This is for show, long enough to muse Odin and the rest of Valkyrie's people that they are in love and this marriage wasn't just for personal gain. Her piercing on her lip is shockingly cold when it first pressed against his warmer mouth and as he kisses her, soft and not yet deep, he finds the smooth surface of it oddly pleasing.

She pulls away with a soft heaving breath, her fingers dipping into the crimson stained water and brushing over his forehead. Hyunjin follows her movements and watches as the bloodied water trails down between her brows.

"Husband," she whispers and just like this, Hyunjin is bound by marriage.

→

The celebrations last well into the night. They danced around the sword, all over the village's centre. In all their journeys they had never witnessed such joy from a settlement. They laugh and dance with them. Drink until they cannot stand on their two feet. People come up with gifts for them, some smaller like crowns made of frosted flowers and ferns, others of shining jewels in jewellery.

Hyunjin and Valkyrie had been strangers not long ago, careful and rather distant but through the celebrations, a haze has veiled them. They dance, Hyunjin's hands at her golden waistline and her bare feet warming by stomping them into the earth and how hot blood flows throughout her body.

Darkness falls and the snow begins to fall once more. With the entry of the icy winds, people retire to their houses until few remain.

“Odin,” Minho grits out. The older man is staring at his daughter with such fondness as Hyunjin lifts a warm cup of warm brew to her lips. The leader sighs softly.

“I recall the days she could fit against my arm, her head as small as my fist,” Minho swallows and at his words, he remembers Eunbyul as a newborn, so tiny that she could fit against his own arm as well. “I lost her mother when she was only five. I swore an oath on her mother’s deathbed I would keep her safe...” His gaze doesn’t halter on her spinning form. “I fear I overlooked her safety with Bjarne... but Hyunjin is,” He finally tears his gaze away from his daughter to look at Minho. “He is good. A man that I know will look after her... even if love isn’t quite developed,”

Minho stays quiet for a few seconds. “You knew?” He smiles and nods with a hum. “That is my daughter, the same soul I have tended to over the years. When she left I knew something was wrong, but I did not know how to come across it... when Hyunjin came in I was hesitant. Perhaps even scared but I now know she is in good hands,”

Minho gazes at his friend, carefree in this moment and something soft and warm unwraps in his gut. “Jisung is missing out on his daughter’s early life,” Minho mutters. I am too. He wants to say that because Odin has described fatherhood in such a way that leaves him bursting. Eunbyul’s first cry echoes through his ears.

Odin gazes with fondness in his eyes at him. “It will not dwindle. That love. Do not worry, my boy. A parents love is something strong enough to withstand wars,”

Minho’s lips purse gently. “We should go get him out.” He mutters and Odin hums in agreement.

He could hear the wedding through the window at the front of the house, the same room where the hearth and that intimating axe sits.

Only faintly he could see his friend get married. Jisung had never seen a wedding before that, and even from a far distance, he smiled faintly at the ceremony.

Bjarne has been gone all day, probably mopping about the celebrations but Jisung doesn't really care. He had already tried to break out but he noticed someone, a guard at the threshold waiting to probably hurt him if he tried anything tricky. And Jisung can't risk anything.

He misses his friends, the warmth of Minho's hand in his own, Felix's laughter and Chan's ever soothing scent. Seungmin and Changbin would tease everyone else while wrapped in each other's embrace, but they are both so caring. Jeongin and his sarcasm that Jisung had to learn and Hyunjin's dramatics.

Jisung hasn't been alone ever since the institution and something inside of him, that's still suffering the aftermaths— the trauma that he has to carry with him is rising in his throat. He panics because he doesn't know when he'll be let out. Being locked up once more sends his heart in overdrive, beating so hard against his ribcage.

Thudding footsteps fill his ears and he leaps from his place to the stairs that lead up to a washing room.

Bjarne enters, the door slamming shut behind him. The air that is let in briefly is icy cold and Jisung shivers. He dropped his fur in his swift movement before.

"There you are," the man hums. Jisung stares back at him. Bjarne chuckles low under his breath.

He bends down to pick up the fur Jisung dropped. He wanders over to him slowly. Each step he takes is intimidating and Jisung wants to run up the stairs like a cornered mouse but there's nowhere to from

there.

Bjarne reaches him and he drapes the fur back over him.

“You know I heard something really interesting about you down at the wedding today...”

The fur is still warm with his body heat and the chill that the winter air carried in is covered by the thick fur. He tilts his head at him, lips pulling to the side in a twisted smirk. Jisung’s jaw tenses and he takes a single step back.

“I doubt many people know anything about me,” he murmurs back. Bjarne lifts a brow and laughs in his face. “Perhaps,” he replies. “But words travel quickly in celebrations,”

“It is a good thing you are pretty,” he tells him and Jisung feels sick. He scoffs and shuffles away to the pitcher of water nearby. He’s trying to act nonchalant, so Bjarne doesn’t suspect the banging of his heart beneath his skin. The man hums.

“I heard you bore a child in the past Spring,” Jisung freezes and if he were holding the water pitcher or the cup, it would’ve clattered to the ground, spilling liquid over his feet. “From your womb, your own flesh and blood,”

He runs for the door.

His heart feels as if it is beating in his throat and he’ll throw it up. Fear fills him and when the heavy footsteps and the hand snatching him by his hip secures him, he lets out a strangled cry.

“Let go of me!” He cries as he tries to pry his hands away but his grip tightens with each struggle.

Bjarne is too strong for him to fight away and though he tries his best, he still struggles in his friend’s grips to get out when they’re playing around with him. He doesn’t have hope against him physically but there is one thing that pops into his mind.

When Minho had first busted down his door in the institution, Jisung had done the only thing to try to save himself.

He's still wearing the combat boots Mydar supplied them with. Waterproof, the soles comfortable for long walks, grip underneath the shoe and metal-capped— sturdy and large. Jisung lifts his right leg, leans his weight in Bjarne's grip and kicks his leg up as hard as he can. These shoes are a lot bigger than his bare feet when he kicked Minho in the balls. And the force of his kick too, Jisung would wince at if he wasn't so scared.

The man yells out and his legs give out on him and Jisung runs, from the door to the hearth, looking for a way out.

He rises to his feet much too quickly and with a roar, he lunges at him.

Jisung turns to the shining battle axe on the chair that he had stared at all night. He leaps for the handle and just as his hands wrap around the wooden shaft, the door breaks down and Hyunjin storms in, Valkyrie and Odin right behind him.

Jisung doesn't halt his movements.

The axe is heavy in his hands and he has to use both his hands to even lift it. He swings it. His shoulder pops out of place with a sickening sound and he screams as the axe hits something thick and hard. Blood sprays and he just collapses at the right time out of the way when Bjarne falls to his knees, screaming.

The axe struck him in the shoulder, the thick blade cutting through like how lumberjacks spilt wood.

Hyunjin scrambles over to him, grabs his hands, slashes his palm and then his own. Bjarne watches with wide eyes and he tries to get up, but Valkyrie flies over, stealing her father's broadsword by his hip. She knocks the thick hilt over his head and knocks him out cold.

Bjarne knew his mistake the moment Hyunjin slashed Jisung's palm. He was bound to his on being, a deep unbreakable bond. To hurt Jisung meant he hurt him personally and here in Scalva, healers are the closest beings to gods.

He'll be thrown out to the snow lions in nothing but his shift and that

axe stuck in his shoulder. He would either freeze or die of blood loss before the lions came. A cruel fate but deserving after everything he's done in his life.

"My shoulder," Jisung cries out between gasps of air. He clutches onto Hyunjin tightly with his good arm, the other hanging painfully by his side.

"Take him back," Odin speaks out. "I'll get him," his eyes are glaring down at the unconscious man's figure. Fury burns deep within them.

If Bjarne doesn't even make it to the mountains alive, no one is accused of murder.

"Quickly!" Valkyrie rushes out as she leads them through the path from Bjarne's home to her and Odin's abode.

The rest of their friends are waiting anxiously to see if Jisung's okay and when his shrill cries of pain drift closer, Minhø barges out of the door, eyes wide and anger evident over his features.

"He's okay," Hyunjin nods at him. Minhø steps aside and Hyunjin rushes in. "Does anyone have bandages?" He calls out to no one in particular but to whoever is listening. Minhø growls, "You said he was fine!"

"I'm okay!" Jisung hisses, brows contorted in pain but he looks angry. "I threw an axe that was too big for me," he grits out. Hyunjin sits him down on the fur-covered lounge that Jeongin and Felix quickly scamper off.

Hyunjin gently presses his hand to his shoulder. "Dislocated," he breathes out. "I can get it back in easily, but it's going to hurt,"

Jisung waves him off with his other hand, shaking his head. "Are you forgetting how I gave birth?" Hyunjin blinks at him. "Those are two very different pains," he speaks but Jisung waves him off again. Valkyrie sits behind him, supporting his back with her chest. Hyunjin

looks at her for a moment and she only nods.

“Bandages!” Changbin cries as he scurries down the wooden stairs.

“Okay, Ji I need you to take a deep breath in,” his good hand searches for a hand and Valkyrie grasps it, squeezing it reassuringly.

He heaves a breath in and with skilled warm hands, Hyunjin presses his hands in a certain way that leaves Jisung screaming for a few milliseconds before his joint pops back in.

“I’m okay now,” Hyunjin sighs out in relief. “It’ll stay tender for some days. I’ll bandage it for you, but you can’t move it unless you want it to hurt for longer.”

Valkyrie slips out from behind Jisung and he didn’t realise he was leaning on her so much and he almost falls back if it isn’t for the broad palm that pushes him back up between his shoulder blades.

Minho slides where Valkyrie was and his hand moves from his back to rest at his hip. “I’m sorry we couldn’t get you sooner,”

“You came just in time, actually,” Jisung was the evil intent in the man’s eyes, but Bjarne was unaware and arrogant. Jisung was not some small mouse that needed his friends protection.

Minho feels the warmth of his body beneath his palm. Jisung shuffles back against his chest and sighs softly. “I am okay,”

“Wouldn’t say the same for Bjarne,” Hyunjin mutters and Jisung hums back at him.

Felix shifts over on his knees and rests his cheek on Jisung’s knee. “You said you swung an axe too big?”

“Bjarne’s own battle weapon. It is now buried in his shoulder,” Valkyrie states. Felix looks at him with wide eyes and Minho’s grip on him tightens a bit. “You dislocated your shoulder throwing his axe at him?” Changbin’s jaw hangs low.

Chan steps forwards, his eyes holding something like concern.

“What did he do for you to do that?” Jisung blinks at the friend they

all call their leader.

“He chased me. Somehow he found out I had a baby. That’s all,” he feels Minho tense behind him slightly. It’s enough. He doesn’t need to say anything else for them to understand.

“He was a bad man. He blended in and pretended to be the perfect son... but behind closed doors he was nothing short of a monster,” Valkyrie says. Her back is turned to them as she speaks. “I’m going to wash for bed,” she says before rushing off.

It’s quiet for a bit until Felix looks up at Hyunjin. “Shouldn’t you maybe go after her?”

“Why?” Hyunjin asks back. “Maybe because you’re her husband now...?”

“Felix... I think she really just needs some time alone now. It’s been a long day. We should all get ready to sleep, then,”

Hyunjin is left in the living room after everyone has gone to their own rooms. He and Valkyrie were supposed to share, she had said so after their wedding ceremony.

He’s hesitant for a few reasons. She seemed like she needed space, and although they did have fun together after the ceremony things between them were kind of awkward.

He climbs the steps to the room she told him they’d share in the nights. It’s a spacious room, two sitting chairs by a hearth that’s lit with a warm fire. The bed is elevated from the floor, covered in thick warm furs. A bow hangs above the bed, a golden arrow gleaming in the warm firelight.

Valkyrie is sitting on the edge of the bed, a comb brushing out her light locks. A slight perfume of a floral scent sits in the air, perhaps from Valkyrie’s bathwater, she washed in prior. “Hey,” Hyunjin gently says as he comes in. Her eyes flicker up to him and she smiles softly. “I was beginning to think you weren’t coming up at all,”

“I have to sleep somewhere,” Hyunjin replies in a soft chuckle. “There is water in the tub for you to wash up in still,” she gestures to

the door to the hearths right. "There are clothes too," Hyunjin gives her a gentle smile before slipping away.

When he comes back, dressed in the cotton shirt and pants, Valkyrie is still sitting in the same spot.

"You did not have to wait for me," Hyunjin tells her as he sits on the opposite side of the bed. She shifts, her legs swinging around to rest on the bed as she moves her body to face him.

"I wanted to talk to you. Like this, face to face,"

He smiles. "Well, we can. Go on,"

She breathes in. "If I asked to join you on your travels, to help and learn the battle techniques from you and your friends what would you say?" She rushes it out and her cheeks dust the faintest pink, or maybe it's just the warmth of the room?

Hyunjin blinks at her and then chuckles. "You would be welcome," he answers her clearly. He knows his friends well enough to know they would say the same thing. Valkyrie was special, like how Fern and Isa were special to Jisung and Eunbyul.

"But what would your father say?" His brows crinkle and she hums. "I had already spoken to him beforehand... I am not just his daughter anymore. I am free to make my own decisions of my whereabouts now,"

"Then I guess it is settled," Hyunjin concludes.

He goes to slip under the sheets, but Valkyrie grips his hand. He looks up at her and her cheeks are clearly flushed now.

"We... we do not need to consummate our marriage?" She asks softly, her gaze flattering. Hyunjin's own face flushes. "Not if you do not want to," he whispers and slips into bed. His stomach is warm and he gulps, shifting around. He leans up to blow out the lamp by his side of the bed. Only the light behind Valkyrie and the faint glow of the hearth lights the room now.

"Do you not want to?" She whispers and Hyunjin sits up to look at

her. "I'm not going to ask you to do anything,"

"Okay..." she murmurs gazing at her lap. "If I said I wanted to, would you?"

Hyunjin's mouth goes dry and his stomach flips. "If we were in love," he answers back. She blinks softly and hums. "Okay," she mutters and blows out the light.

She slips under the covers, tucking herself near the edge of the bed. She falls asleep quickly, but Hyunjin is left awake, trying to process what just happened. His cheeks flush at the thought and he squeezes his eyes shut before opening them to look at his wife who is close to falling out of the bed she's that far away.

She looks uncomfortable, even in the soft contentment of sleep. He reaches over and gently pulls her further into the bed with one arm hooked around her soft waist. He settles next to her, his thigh brushing by hers as he shifts one last time.

As much as Hyunjin wasn't expecting to get married on this journey, or this young, really just in general, it's definitely not as bad as he first thought. Valkyrie is nice, strong, able to lead and take care of herself. She rolls in her sleep, her sleeping face in his view now.

He smiles gently and finds her warm hand in the haze of half-sleep.

And even though there is no love between them, Hyunjin can't help but feel a certain fondness bloom for his new wife.

→

Odin hugs his daughter tight. He speaks to her in their native tongue and pats her cheeks with such fondness everyone has witnessed

between Jisung and Eunbyul.

To try to train some of their warriors in groups, Valkyrie had given her father the location of the cave her mother filled with modernised weapons. Odin would train them with video explanation on the device Minho gave him of them showing how to use them, how combat was best with them. Their ship is supplied with extra food, a gift from Odin himself and him just wanting to take care of his daughter even if he is not there with her.

Odin had been just as surprised as his daughter when he saw the ship, Valkyrie had laughed at his reaction, knowing how his shock felt. Jisung understood it too, but to some extent. He was used to Mydar by the time they got the ship.

Odin looks at Hyunjin. He wanders over to his father-in-law and smiles just as he's bundled up in a bear hug from him too. "My son, take care of her. When she wakes from nightmares, she likes her hair played with. I know you both do not love each other right now, but my daughter is worth all the stars in the sky. You will see it and do not be afraid of love blooming," he pulls him away and nods at him. Hyunjin nods back, a bit overwhelmed. "Now go," he gives him a pat on the back. "Thank you for everything you have already done for her,"

"Always," Hyunjin gulps out before jumping up to the ship.

"I will call you, papa!" Valkyrie waves to him from the ships closing doors. He waves from the top of his horse and when the doors are shut the leader's daughter sighs softly.

Hyunjin smiles down at her. "You will see him soon,"

"I know," she murmurs back.

→

“You know I forgot how convenient electricity is,” Changbin muses over the controls for the ship. “Don’t you dare touch anything,” Minho grits out at him and Changbin laughs. “Don’t worry pilot, I’m not brave enough to risk crashing the ship,”

“At least you have some common sense,” Changbin glares at his friend. “Fuck you I’m smart too!”

“I didn’t say you weren’t!” Minho cries back. Jisung whacks him over the head and Minho jumps, turning to him with a pout.

“Stop fighting, the radars beeping. The both of you are idiots,” he points to the radar which is both beeping and flickering as it senses something in the distance.

“It’s not beeped before...” Changbin whispers.

“Maybe there’s an electric signal it’s picking up on? It hasn’t picked up one before and the settlements we’ve been to haven’t had any electricity so far?” Minho suggests. “That makes sense,” Chan agrees as he walks in.

“That’ll be something new,” Changbin murmurs.

“Alright let’s get everyone informed and stuff put together,” Chan says and leaves quickly. “Well,” Minho shrugs. “You heard the man!”

They’re pretty much pros at this now. Only Valkyrie is scurrying about and probably dealing with the same nerves they had in Sunsen. The nerves don’t really go away since each place is so different, so unknown it is still daunting.

It is cold when they exit the ship, but no where near as cold as Scalva but there is a persistent chill in the air.

“Hey, doesn’t this look like it’s close to Mydar? The environment looks really similar to that forest we were in before we got to Mydar?” Jeongin points around and Jisung cocks his head. “I think you’re right,” Seungmin laughs. “That’s kind of crazy. We can get Isa to see if she can find it on the radar now we have its coordinates?”

There's a path that pops up and they decide to follow that instead of climbing through the forest.

"So... do we have a plan if they end up being hostile?" Valkyrie asks and Jisung nods. "We run," Felix answers for him. "Minho has a remote and we get back in the ship,"

"Doesn't seem like much of a plan..." She whispers and Hyunjin chuckles at her. "There's not much else we can do without accidentally causing a war between us and them," she nods in understanding. "No shooting,"

"Nope," Hyunjin confirms.

"Oh!" Seungmin points ahead of the path. "I think I see people," They look to where he's pointing and sure enough there are.

"But hey..." Felix squints. "Are they running? Towards us?" They're fast, feet picking up in the dirt and repelling themselves forwards.

"Guys," Changbin pales. "They have spears," long shafts and sharp glittering blades atop them can be seen in the near distance. "They're definitely not happy to see us," he concludes.

"Yeah, fuck," Minho swears and grips onto Jisung's hand.

"Chan," Jisung calls out. Their leader takes a step backwards when the shouts begin.

"Run!"

Hyunjin grabs Valkyrie's hand and drags her along, but she ends up being faster than him and drags him along instead.

Minho scrambles for the remote in his pocket and he finds it just in time, ten meters ahead of the ship. The doors open quickly and they jump up. Changbin scales the opening doors easily, then Hyunjin with his height. He scoops Valkyrie up and Chan pushes Seungmin and Felix up. Jeongin gets help from Changbin while Minho pretty much throws Jisung in before propelling himself in just as he presses the button for the doors to shut.

The doors shut just as a spear is thrown in.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for the wait!! I finally got everything sorted out with the writing set up and I'm so busy atm lol I'm trying to juggle my little art business thats growing and just my last year of high school in general! Although i love writing so much it really helps me to distress so there's that!!

I know I've said this before but I LOVE Valkyrie!! I've only wrote fics for sf9 and skz and i love that but to write female characters... I'm in love seriously WOMEN ARE SO COOL?!?!? Goddesses. That's final. But seriously i love writing her!!

This fic is coming along!! It's definitely becoming longer than I expected but I'm very okay with that bc quality and quantity are coming our way lol the plot keeps getting thicker and I'm excited...

Again sorry for the delay!!

Notes for the Chapter:

There's a brief moment with needles nearing the end
but what's new lol

The spear shaft wobbles as it lays on the ground, still vibrating from the force it was thrown with.

"Well," Jeongin clears his throat. "That's could have definitely gone a lot better,"

"Or a lot worse," Minho adds as he picks up the spear.

"So what are we supposed to do now?" Felix asks just as a loud bang clangs against the metal door of their ship. They all flinch backwards and further from the doors.

"Maybe we should just go?" Seungmin suggests. The banging continues and shouts begin. "They're clearly not happy!" A band sounds from above them, someone jumping on the top of the ship.

Jisung turns to Minho, eyes wide and flinching as each bang clangs against the metal lining of the ship. "Is it possible to only open the doors by a few centimetres?" The older man's eyes widen a bit and he opens his mouth, his brows furrowing.

"I've never tried," he answers back.

"Okay," Jisung breathes out heavily. "If you open the doors and everyone else holds a gun, I think I can calm them,"

"Are you crazy?" Seungmin hisses from beside him. He had only heard his last sentence, but by even looking at Minho, Jisung knows he is just as hesitant as Seungmin is. Jisung shakes his head and runs to his room, where the device Fern gave him sits next to his bed.

"Pull the spring and throw, pull the spring and throw," he mutters as he hurries back out.

“Do you have a plan?” Hyunjin shouts from near the door. Valkyrie lifts her gun to the door.

“Don’t shoot unless they attack first,” Jisung says.

“What’s that?” Minho points to the device in his hand. Jisung shrugs. “Fern said it would save us.” He answers. “As soon as the doors open I’m going to throw it out,”

“Sounds reckless,” Jeongin puts in and Changbin nods in agreement. “But when has anything we’ve ever done not been reckless and dangerous?” Chan shouts from the doors.

“He’s said it!” Seungmin shouts.

“Well, I guess there is no other option for us at this point,” Minho murmurs under his breath. He stretches out his neck and lifts the remote in his hand. “Are you ready?” He looks to Jisung who nods, confident. He moves closer to the doors, the device held tightly in his hand.

“Count to three?”

“Just open them!” Jisung grits back out and Minho sucks in a deep breath before slamming his thumb down on the button to open the doors.

The doors open barely a few centimetres before Jisung pulls the spring out and a rush of green smoke flows from the bottom of it. He keeps it in his hand for barely a second before he throws it. It goes through the gap easily and it soars ten meters ahead, exploding a mist of green ahead. They duck down in the ship as a crack fills the air.

Then it’s quiet.

“Was that a fucking bomb?” Hyunjin hisses.

“Do you think Fern would give me a bomb?” Jisung hisses back and Hyunjin slowly stands from the ground, his hand around Valkyrie’s forearm to help her back to her feet.

“Are they not attacking anymore?”

The doors open the last bit and Hyunjin takes a step back, Valkyrie in tow close behind him. The rest haul themselves to their feet.

Six people stand at the doors, their spears stationary by their sides. A man, the eldest by decades steps up into the ship. Chan grabs Jeongin and Felix and pulls them backwards, out of the man's touch. He reaches out for Jisung instead. Minho leaps for him, an arm wrapping around his waist and pulling him back. But the man grips on his shoulder—the one that he had dislocated only a few days ago—and Jisung yelps, eyes wide. The man cocks his head at him and presses his hand to the middle of his chest. Jisung blinks at him and when he steps away from him to Jeongin he lets out a deep breath.

“Come,” the man grits out after he’s done the same thing to Jeongin and Chan.

“Is this a good sign?” Valkyrie whispers to Hyunjin. He looks down at her and purses his lips. “I don’t know,” he replies honestly.

“You must meet our leader,” he gestures with his hand for them to follow. He jumps out and bangs his spear twice on the ground. The other five turn ahead to the track, waiting for them to join.

“Oh what the hell,” Jeongin grunts before jumping down to join them. He throws his hands up in the air at the others still in the ship. “So are you coming or is it up to me to win these guys over?”

Hyunjin chuckles at him and jumps, locking him in a headlock as soon as his feet are on the ground. “Not alone, Brother,”

They follow them down quickly, hurrying after the six men in front of them.

“The coast is nearby,” Valkyrie speaks softly. She’s stuck to Hyunjin’s side, her hand clasped tightly in his, her other hand on the hilt of her blade by her waist. Her bow is strung on her back, a quiver hanging off her shoulder. Jisung’s never seen Valkyrie fight and he’s not sure if she’s just taking extra caution or if she’s a skilled warrior in many areas of combat.

Knowing her father and her people, Jisung judges it to be the latter.

“The air is thick with salt,” she murmurs. “Scalva’s coastal line is rocky and dangerous. You can feel the wild winds from inland. This place is different,”

“I think that’s a good thing,” Hyunjin replies. “We don’t want to go astray in the ocean now do we?”

“I’ve had enough experience of that to last me a lifetime!” Jisung mutters angrily and Minho pats him on the back. Valkyrie raises a brow, but she doesn’t ask.

The six men leading them suddenly come to a stop as the path diverges into a clearing, houses made with mud bricks and timber roofing are scattered throughout the clearing and people stop carrying on their daily tasks to stare at them,

The men suddenly grip their spears tighter and quickly spin, locking their spears in a circle around the newcomers.

“Oh fuck,” Jisung hears Minho mutter under his breath. His grip on his hand tightens and he shuffles closer to him. “Maybe we should have just left?” Hyunjin hisses.

“I thought the flare worked,” Jeongin grits back. “Maybe this is a welcoming ceremony...” Felix adds.

“But if they did want to kill us wouldn’t have they done that before taking us to the village?” Valkyrie puts in and Jisung grabs Felix’s hand where he’s standing behind him. Felix squeezes his hand back, his grip tight around his thin hand.

“It won't matter if they kill us,” Minho grits out.

“Shut up,” The older man hisses at them. “We will not kill you,” Jisung feels like he can finally breathe after the reassurance from the man. “For now,” he adds and his heart leaps in his chest.

“Follow. Don’t even dare to try to escape,”

They begin to walk, further into the clearing, around a large fire.

Something is cooking in the coals and Jisung notices now how hungry he is. They had eaten last night and they had forgotten in the rush of finding a new settlement to eat breakfast.

They're pushed to the front of the fire, the spears still pointed at them.

An older man than the man holding a spear to Hyunjin's chest—Valkyrie's hand is pressed against his chest where the tip hovers by—appears at the steep stairs in front of them. The men wielding spears bow their heads to the new man.

"Take them up," he instructs in a gruff voice. His orders are obeyed and the spears rise with them. "Does anyone have a gun?" Minho hisses out. The guards surrounding them pay no mind, or don't hear them. Valkyrie moves the hem of her shirt up, the white blouse under her leather corset and the shotgun strapped to her hip.

"Me too," Jeongin adds quietly.

At the top of the stairs, a large building stands. It's made of mud bricks, lengthy and wide and there's a steady amount of smoke rising from the chimney. The wooden doors are pushed open and they're lead in, through a few different entryways, each full of people gazing at them.

They finally reach a closed door, two lit torches on either side of it. A man says something in a different language and the doors open, leading into a room that looks very different from the rest of the building.

The floors are tiled, black and polished underneath their muddied boots. Bookshelves and a desk made of shining wood but it's the lights hanging from the ceiling, illuminated by not fire unlike the rest of the rooms in the building, but from electricity.

Jisung looks at Minho who is gazing up at the lights, his brows furrowed deeply.

A woman steps out from between two bookshelves.

Her hair catches fire in the artificial light, shining like the hearths in

Scalva. She's taller than Hyunjin, limbs long and thick with muscle. Her dark eyes pierce down at them all.

"We do not enjoy the company of outsiders," she says as she makes a gesture with her hand. The men holding the spears around them fall back, their spears finally gone. Valkyrie's hand falls from Hyunjin's body. He captures it with his hand, his larger hand engulfing her calloused hand.

"That much is obvious," Minh grits out. Her eyes flicker to him and amusement flickers over her face when he doesn't falter. She moves her gaze to Valkyrie in front of her. Valkyrie is around the same height as Jisung and a similar build. They're not big people and the woman before them is far from petite.

The woman with auburn hair reaches out for Valkyrie's forearm and tugs her forwards out of Hyunjin's grip. He tries to hold onto her but the woman tugs on her harder and he lets her go, not wanting to hurt her.

She hums down at her as her fingers dance up her arm, to her throat, her jaw and sliding back down to her wrist. "Why do you travel alone with men?" Valkyrie narrows her eyes at her. "I travel with my husband," she lifts her hand to Hyunjin who grabs her hand and pulls her back to his side, safe in their group again.

The tall woman cocks her head and suddenly Jisung's kicked in the back of the knees, falling to the ground. He takes Minh and Felix down with him and soon enough they're all on the ground in front of her, the spears aimed at them again. Valkyrie turns and locks eyes with Jisung, worry evident all over her face.

"There is odd energy somewhere in you," she gazes over at them. "I thought perhaps it was the girl," Valkyrie shuffles closer to Hyunjin until their thighs touch. "I was wrong," her eyes land on Jisung, his hands in tight fists in his lap.

"Ha," she laughs out and steps closer to him. She grips him by the bicep and pulls at him. Minh is quick and grabs him around the waist, keeping him close. Her eyes harden and she tugs on him again. With a cock of her head, there are spear tips at both of their throats.

Minho looks into Jisung's eyes. They're wide with terror and his hands shake. The guard grabs a fistful of the younger man's hair, stretches his head back so his throat is on display, the tip pressing into the soft skin there. Minho doesn't have a choice. They don't know these people and Minho will never risk getting Jisung killed.

His grip loosens and she quickly plucks him up off the ground. He struggles to his feet but she doesn't even wait for him to find his balance. He is dragged across the floor like a newly born calf struggling to find his feet beneath him. She swings a door open between the two bookshelves and throws him in.

She slams the door behind her.

The floor is cold under his skin and Jisung doesn't have enough time to look around at the boxy power generators around the room before she's stomping on his thigh, pinning him in place.

"Please," he whispers out. "I won't try anything." Her foot only becomes heavier and he grits his teeth. "You people decide to show up now? Where are you from?"

"If you stop hurting me, maybe I'll tell you?" He spits out suddenly. It surprises him a bit too. He had gone from scared to angry and hostile in mere seconds. She chuckles at him and releases his leg.

"So," she bends, smirking as she does. Jisung wants to punch that sly look off of her face, see it morph into a look of shock instead. "You tell me why you are here, why you had that thing and why your energy flows the way it does,"

Jisung frowns at her.

They've come this far, intimidated the whole time they've been here. Jisung will not spare any details. "A war brings us around the world to warn and inform. Gather up the strength to beat the enemy we will face,"

She dares to laugh in his face.

"Child, you do not speak of wars so lightly. Like it is an easy feat to get people moved by your cause,"

"I did not say I thought it was easy," he grits out. "We have given up so many things to be here where we are today. And what do we get in return? Spears pointed at our throats?" Her brows knit together. "You may think you know of war. Of battle and combat but by the looks of your tribe, you have no idea what awaits for us all," Jisung hisses at her.

She lunges at him, a blade back at his throat. Jisung gulps and his eyelids flutter but anger overwhelms him and with a growl from deep within his stomach, he grips her wrist that holds the blade, his other hand at her hip as he swings his knees up, kneeing her in the soft part of her lower abdomen. She heaves and he topples over her, one knee on her sternum, the other pinning her arm to the ground. He grabs the knife from her and hovers it over her throat.

"See?" He spits out at her. She's mad, furious even but Jisung doesn't care. He has been walked over enough in his life and he will not accept anyone else taking advantage of him, even if it might sever an alliance from the start.

"Isn't so nice when you have a knife in your face, isn't it?" She bucks her knees up and Jisung gives in, hauling himself to his feet. She growls at him, her red hair swings over her shoulders, the beaded ends of the plaits that frame her face clang together as she reaches for his throat with her bare hands.

She doesn't give in easily either it seems.

Jisung reaches out for her neck in retaliation and her eyes widen as he stares into her brown eyes while he struggles for air. She splutters and lets him go suddenly, gazing down at her hand with confusion.

"My bloodline has been able to feel human energy for generations," she speaks. "I have not felt such energy from a young boy like you before,"

Jisung scoffs. "And what energy do I give off?"

She blinks at him, her lips pursing in thought. "Strength," she murmurs. "You are a leader, whatever that means to you. But your energy is not one of a typical man,"

“Because I’m not a typical man,” He shrugs and her eyes gaze over him again. “These people that will claim war on all of us, I came from there. All of us except for Valkyrie, the woman. We all have stories to tell of the things they had done. I escaped with them over a year ago and when I left, I wasn’t just one person,” she sighs and shakes her head at him.

“Child, I did not ask to hear a sob story—“

“You asked about my energy? Did you not?” She stares at him before crossing her arms and settling against the wall. He continues. “I ran with them for eight months. For eight months I had carried a child within me.” Her brows furrow and he waits.

“I have heard of no such thing,” she hisses.

“I would hope not,” he replies coolly.

“You want us to ally against this war?” Jisung folds his arms across his chest. “I believe it would be the smart decision for both sides. You would benefit with our alliances we have already gained,” she lifts a brow and hums.

“My people here have lived well with no interference from snobby people. I will not disrupt their lives for you to just get revenge on your homeland,”

“They say the home is where the heart lays,” Jisung hurries out. She had reached for the door handle mere seconds ago. She spares him a look. “My heart has never laid in the place where I was sold and mutated for seven years,”

Her hand stays on the handle. “My answer is final, no matter how tragic your story grows.”

“I am not trying to gain sympathy! We have come to warn you! Do you know what a gun is? What a bomb is?”

She spins this time, eyes wide. “You know what a bomb is?”

Jisung is rather surprised that it is that that finally piques her interest. “Of course. I know many things like that,”

"There are old reports that explain the destruction of bombs... can they really take out cities?"

Jisung pauses briefly.

"Countries," He answers back. "They can take out countries,"

→

Minho whisks him into his arms as soon as he's in sight once more.

"What's happened?" He whispers to him. Jisung shakes in his arms, quiet. He doesn't ask him anything else, knowing he's had enough for today. Potentially the whole week, even.

"You must all be on your way. We will not hold you up but we can offer nothing to you all,"

Chan opens his mouth but she frowns, her face hard. No one dares to say anything else.

When they're walking out, it's a much less stressful experience since spears are not pointing all around them as they trudge down the stairs.

Jisung suddenly halts just as they're exiting the clearing back onto the path. A wheezing cough fills his ears and he turns to see a child, no more than two years old collapsed by a tree. His heart picks up in his chest and he looks around, trying to spot a caregiver but after seeing no one and watching the poor child trying to cry, he leaps forwards, tugging them to his chest.

"Hyunjin!" He instantly screams. The child's heart is beating too fast, skin clammy and she struggles to breathe in air to her lungs, helplessly wheezing for air. The doctor turns on his heels and his eyes go wide when he sees his friend cradling the ill child.

“Shit,” he mutters as he hurries over. Valkyrie follows hot on his trail while Chan rummages for the first aid kit in the bag he had been carrying.

Jisung rocks her gently in his arms while Hyunjin reaches them.

“Where was she?” He asks as he presses his fingers to her pulse. “By this tree, just laying there,”

“Heart rate is way too fast,” he murmurs.

“Minho,” Jisung calls over after he’s looked up. People are noticing them and Jisung fears that they’ll all be put into danger over this. “Get the people with guns in front,” Valkyrie passes her gun to Minho in favour to crouch by her husband.

Chan passes the kit to Hyunjin who zips it open quickly. “Can you help her?” Valkyrie whispers and Hyunjin nods. “Anaphylactic shock,” he deems quickly. “Hey, darling can you hear us?” Jisung brushes dark hair from her eyes. She makes a wheezing noise and Jisung nods to Hyunjin. The doctor scurries through the bag for the shot of adrenaline. “You’re going to feel all better soon, hm? Would you like to hold my hand?” Her small hand reaches up and Jisung takes it, giving it a few squeezes.

“I found it,” Hyunjin announces, holding up the shot. Valkyrie watches intrigued but Jisung doesn’t miss the clear worry in her icy eyes. With one hand, Hyunjin moves her dress up and Valkyrie reaches out to hold it up to give her husband both his hands to work with. “Just a pinch okay? And then you’ll feel much better,” Hyunjin tells her softly and just before he can give her the dosage, a spear is thrown.

The red-haired woman flies towards them, Minho fires a warning shot by her feet and she halts.

“That is my daughter!” She cries out.

Hyunjin doesn’t spare another moment and quickly injects the adrenaline. She wheezes at the initial prick of the needle but calms quickly.

“Let her in,” Jisung calls out and Jeongin and Minho part, only allowing her in, this time they’re in control with the guns in their hands over the spears in the guards’ hands.

She skids on her knees over to her daughter and quickly takes her from Jisung.

“What have you done!”

“We were saving her!” Jisung hisses. “If it weren’t for us finding her quick enough this would’ve gone very differently,” he whispers lowly. Hyunjin nods. He eyes the little girl, relaxing in her mother’s arms. Her breathing is becoming steadier and Hyunjin breathes out heavily.

“Your daughter is allergic to something. Severely. Has she had anything she hasn’t had before?” The woman purses her lips. “They brought in a catch of prawns this morning. We do not give babies them until they are older,”

“That’s most likely it,” Hyunjin tells her. “Seafood is a typical allergy,”

“You stabbed her,” She growls then and Hyunjin nods, surprisingly calm now. She shifts her child from her arms, she whines and Jisung takes her quickly. Her mother then lunges at Hyunjin, her fists crashing against his nose. Hyunjin doesn’t have much time to react and he yelps out in pain and almost just as fast as the weight of her was upon him, it’s gone.

Valkyrie flies over the top of him, tackling the woman to the dirt. They scurry around in the dirt. Valkyrie is on top first, then she’s eating a mouthful of dirt as the older woman flips them and digs her knees into her back. The blonde woman fights her off and finds her feet frightfully quick. She unsheathes her blade from her hip. It’s long enough to be a sword, but it is thin, almost weightless in her hand.

She points it at the other woman’s heart, her chest heaving and her blue eyes shining with a look Jisung has yet to see from her. He’s seen it before, the crazed look of protection, the brute strength of someone who cares. “You don’t put a finger on him,” Valkyrie

growls.

“Your daughter will only live because of him and that's how you repay him? Trying to injure him? I do not know your village, but in my nation, he is valued like a god himself. You don't come across hands of raw healing magic every day,” she grits her teeth at her.

“Mother,” a small voice croaks out. The little girl's breathing is much better, though still not great it is a great improvement. Hyunjin stares at his wife who's walking over to him, offering a hand up. He takes it, staring at her face. His ears are flushed and he reaches out to wipe off the smudge of dirt against her cheek. She smiles up at him and settles beside him, looking like she's almost guarding him as he packs away the first aid kit.

“Then,” Chan clears his throat. Seungmin helps Jisung stand back up. His legs are a bit shaky after so much adrenaline in such a short time. The little girl is passed to her mother who looks at Hyunjin again.

“My name is Tenebris,” she tells them. Seungmin offers her a small smile. They tell her their names in return. Hyunjin has to urge Valkyrie to introduce herself.

“You saved my daughters life,” she bows her head at Hyunjin. “I must apologise for my behaviour earlier, a mother's fear of their child hurting is easy to drown in,”

“I'll say,” Jisung whispers and Felix wraps an arm around his waist, his head resting on his shoulder.

“I know you probably don't like me very much now after all I've done... but please I can give a proposition,”

Chan looks around to their family and then back to her. “You are the leader, Chan?”

“I suppose so?” He shrugs. She locks eyes with Jisung who looks to Chan instead. “I know I said we would not do anything for the war but I believed you to just be young and inexperienced. These turn of events have proved otherwise. We have reports of old wars, strategic plans and the people of these villages are smart, warriors. We can

help, but only if you help us first?”

Jisung just hopes it isn't as long as a stay as what Sunsen had been. He was itching to leave this place.

“And what could we assist with, then?” Changbin asks from Chan's right.

“Medical attention,” she says simply.

They gaze towards Hyunjin who smiles. “I can set something up. I'm willing to help,” Tenebris hums softly. “Then we shall do that.”

“Ah!” Jisung remembers suddenly. He goes to dig through the bag and quickly comes back with a device. “This is something we use to communicate from far away,” he passes it to her and she cocks her head for a guard to come to get it.

“It will come in handy later, I assume,”

“It should.” Jisung nods.

“Well then, now that business is over I must admit this morning has made me ravenous,” Hyunjin laughs.

→

They stay in Patrum for five days. The people were nice and even nicer when they found out there was free medical attention that was much more efficient than the healers that worked with limited supplies of herbs. Those healers talked to Hyunjin a lot, almost too much that it would interfere with looking after people. But quickly Hyunjin notices Valkyrie's interest in the medical field. She learnt quickly and in their free time, he'd teach her new things. Small things to start with. How to bandage a wound properly, how to treat a chesty cough.

Valkyrie is a woman of many talents and when she learned something new, Hyunjin yearned to see the sparkle of her eyes after.

Tenebris sees them goodbye with a wave, her daughter Mali by her legs.

“Well,” Changbin says as he flops on the lounge. “We always thought we were gonna get killed entering a new settlement. This is the closest call so far,” he sings and Felix whacks him as he walks past.

“So far?!”

“You can never be prepared for these things!” He cries out and Seungmin throws a pillow at his boyfriend. “Shut up,” he whispers and the elder pouts at him. To that, Seungmin rolls his eyes at him.

Jeongin sighs loudly. Jisung turns to him and grabs his hand. “Are you feeling okay?” Lately, he had been tired. He had fainted yesterday afternoon and Hyunjin hadn’t found anything wrong so they ruled it down to stress.

“Actually I feel horrible right now,” he winces. “I think something is wrong with me,”

Jisung purses his lips and brings his hand up to his forehead. “Hey you’re a bit hot... let’s go find Hyunjin, hey?” He agrees and Jisung takes him to the doctors shared room with his wife. Valkyrie is in bed, snuggled up beneath the blankets while Hyunjin is sitting at the desk, looking at papers.

“Hey what’s up?”

“I feel like shit,” Hyunjin turns to gaze over at him. “You look pale,” he frowns. “Slight fever,” Jisung adds.

“I’ve had odd cramps lately too they’re like shooting stabbing pains,”

“That’s not that odd for the pain to feel different but I can get the ultrasound out to make sure everything is running right?” The doctor suggests.

“Go for it,” Jeongin sighs. “I feel horrible,”

"I'll meet you in your room then, okay?" Hyunjin carefully gets out of the chair, so the noise of it scrapping over the floor doesn't wake his sleeping wife.

"Did you get ultrasounds a lot in the institution too?" Jisung asks as the younger settles himself on his bed, his shirt lifted and pants low on his hips. "Yep. The ones for the first three years were so annoying,"

"And you had to have an ultrasound before painkillers too, it was horrible," Jisung shivers. "I've had enough to last a lifetime, I bet,"

"I wouldn't doubt it," Jeongin replies. "I didn't take the meds all the time but I know what you mean. You just want to sleep after you take it but this bright light fills the room, ugh. Horrible,"

Hyunjin enters and the both of them laugh at the bright screen that illuminates the otherwise dark room. "I hate the gel. It makes my skin oddly tight," Jeongin comments as Hyunjin squeezes a little bit on his stomach.

Hyunjin squints at the screen as he manoeuvres the ultrasound probe over his stomach. "Huh," he mutters to himself. Jeongin shoots a worried look at Jisung.

"I'm gonna check the blood flow..." he murmurs to him and with a press of the button the screen flashes blue and red in areas. Hyunjin frowns and squints at the screen before his lips part and he freezes for a few minutes.

"We have to get to Mydar," he tells them. Jisung knows he's panicked but he tries his best to not show it. Jisung peeks at the screen and sees what Hyunjin is looking at.

"What's happening?" Jeongin sits up. Hyunjin bites down on his lip. "There's no blood flow to the uterus... it's dying."

"Then that means—" Jisung gulps and Hyunjin nods.

"If I don't get it out in time... you will become septic and that's something we need to avoid,"

“So it’s getting it cut out of me or I die?” Jeongin asks bluntly. Hyunjin shoots a look at Jisung before he looks at the youngest again.

“It’s the only way.” The doctor whispers. “Because it’s an artificial womb, it is much different to a typical womb. You both know that already, but I’d say the hormone regulation device broke and it is just giving up,”

“Then, I’ll tell Minho to get us there in record time,” Jisung hurries out of the room.

Hyunjin stares at Jeongin. “I’m sorry,”

“Don’t be,” Jeongin flashes him a small smile. “I’ll be fine. I trust you all,”

But Jeongin doesn’t speak of the fear running through him. He could die. This easily, just like that.

There’s so much ahead, so much he has yet to do. He doesn’t care about the removal of his uterus, it didn’t belong inside of him anyway.

So he takes a deep breath and hopes to god that he doesn’t die.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone!!! So first of all Jisung sticking up for himself in this chapter is another big step for him!! Good for him !!

But the last ten or so chapters I’ve noticed a big decline in engagement like comments and such and is it bc the slow burn is too slow? Idk but I really love to read comments so its making me sad LMAO

We’re getting closer to the relationship i promise!!!

(Also the next few chapters are in a setting i am so excited about... heheh)

Notes for the Chapter:

Tw! Injuries Needles, stitches

Minho gets them to Mydar in twenty-four hours after Jeongin is diagnosed.

His condition had deteriorated quickly, from exhaustion to a sudden high fever and just as he was being to struggle to keep conciseness, the ship finally lands.

Chan carries him out, the boy weak in his arms, but holding on. Jisung had called Fern and Isa to tell them of their arrival and asked for them to get a surgery room for them as soon as they landed. They all hurry out of the ship and Jisung is reminded of their first arrival in Mydar, all of them following Chan with one of their sick.

Fern and Isa are there at the medical bubble, Eunbyul in Fern's hold as they wait for them anxiously.

They spot them quickly, they have always been easy to spot, the darkness of their clothes standing out against all the green and overall brightness of Mydar. Chan rushes ahead with Hyunjin in his tow.

“How is he?” Isa asks, her brows furrowed in concern for Jeongin. “Not too great,” Felix whispers and Changbin pulls him into a hug.

Eunbyul stirs from her sleep in Fern’s arms. Jisung’s eyes had been locked on her the moment they entered the bubble. “Oh my baby,” he murmurs and reaches for her as she rubs her eyes. Fern passes her to him, a fond smile on her face. She recognises him straight away, a massive smile blooming across her face.

Minho's heart clenches in his chest. His little star belonged in his arms and he knew how much Jisung has missed his infant daughter. She’s much bigger now, though. Six months old now, her cheeks are chubbier than ever and to Jisung’s amusement, her brown hair is curling into soft rings. She snuggles up to his warmth, her head resting on his shoulder, big hazel eyes staring at Minho now. She lifts her head and reaches out a hand, laughing. He takes her tiny hand in his much bigger one and kisses it. She giggles at him before burying her head into her dad's neck, her eyes fluttering shut.

Minho notices then Valkyrie next to him, nervously looking around everywhere. “Are you okay?” He asks her and she gulps. “I have never been in such a high building before,” she whispers out. “Is this not going to topple over in the wind?”

“I can assure you it won’t,” Fern smiles at her. “I’m Fern and this is my wife Isa. We’ve heard quite a lot about you and Hyunjin,” The younger girls cheeks flush and she cranes her neck downwards, a display of respect they’d learnt after staying in Scalva for a bit.

“Valkyrie. I am pleased to meet you both. I have also heard lots about you both,”

“Good things I hope,” Isa laughs as she finally gives in and bundles Jisung into her arms. “As if I would have anything bad to say,” Jisung scoffs, hugging her back with one arm.

“Do you know how long the surgery will take?” Fern then asks and Changbin nods his head. “If all goes well, not over an hour,”

“I’m sure it will go smoothly,” Isa speaks, trying to soothe the jumping nerves. “Hyunjin is a very competent doctor,”

“I don’t doubt him,” Seungmin pats Changbin on the back. “Me either,” he whispers.

“Well, while we wait perhaps we should go to our quarters to relax?” Fern suggests.

→

“She is a very beautiful baby,” Valkyrie coos. She can sit up by herself now, so most of them are sitting on the living areas floor with her. Jisung is delighted to play with her, finally able to play with the little bear he made after she was born. She enjoys all the attention immensely, soaking it up with big baby smiles.

“I think so too,” Jisung replies with a wide smile.

“Your old residence is still in the same way it was left,” Isa tells them. She’s sitting on the lounge in one of her yellow dresses, Fern in her signature green next to her. “He will need time to heal so why not stay in comfort while you can?”

“The ship isn’t that bad,” Changbin shrugs. “But it would be nice. I’m imagining we’re going to need to stay a few weeks.”

“Do you still think they’ll wait another year to begin their attacks?” Seungmin asks Fern who nods her head slowly. “We haven’t noticed many changes, but we haven’t sent anyone else out there again. It’s too risky if they catch an outsider,”

“We should have enough time to get things ready, then.” Felix sighs just as a knock sounds out. Isa goes to get it and wanders back in with Nic.

“Oh, you’re still here!” Felix blinks up at him, wincing as Eunbyul grabs a fistful of his hair. “I thought we had discussed that already,” He laughs at him and Felix hums as Jisung pries his daughter’s fingers free from his hair. “Oh and you’ve brought someone new,” he looks at Valkyrie who stares at him with her piercing eyes.

“Hyunjin’s wife,” she introduces herself to him. “Valkyrie Gulljord,” Nic doesn’t hide his surprise but he nods nonetheless. “I just came to say hi. People were speaking of your return,”

“Not for good just yet,” Minho speaks. “One of our own needed treatment. When he is healed we have to go on,”

Chan comes in then and they jump up, Jisung picking Eunbyul up with him.

“Is he okay?” They all speak at once. Chan smiles at them and they all breathe out in relief. “They’re almost done. I had to help the nurses grab things. His fever was dangerously high so I had to scamper around searching for medication... why are there so many medicines?” Felix bundles him up in a hug, kissing him on the cheek. “You’ve done well,”

He smiles down at him and kisses him softly.

→

Jeongin woke up a few hours after his surgery in recovery. He fell back asleep quickly though, tired from both medications and just overall exhaustion. Hyunjin trudges back to their residence, his hands shaking slightly.

It is one thing to see your friend ill, but a whole new thing having to do surgery on them to save them from that illness. Night has fallen

and when he enters, all the lights are turned off, doors to their rooms shut. He opens the door to his room and finds Valkyrie standing in the doorway of the bathroom in her nightwear. It's much warmer in Mydar and she's traded her usual longer clothing for a silk shift, leaving her arms bare.

He stares at her. Her pale arms patterned with dark ink spreading from her biceps to her thin wrists.

"I did not know you had so many tattoos," Hyunjin whispers. "There are many things you do not know about me, dear husband," She replies. She gestures for him to go wash up. "I can wait up if you'd like to speak?"

"Yeah," Hyunjin swallows thickly but he nods at her. "Go," she takes a seat on the smaller bed than they've shared before. "I will wait,"

She does wait. Just like before she's sitting on the bed, waiting patiently for him.

"You did well these past two days," she says as she moves over, allowing space for him. "I'm also sorry about the small bed, everyone took the other rooms and Jisung and Eunbyul are asleep in the big bed,"

"I can sleep on the lounge?" Hyunjin suggests and she frowns. "Don't be ridiculous, get in, you'll have to just keep me extra warm tonight," he chuckles at her and slips under the soft sheets. She follows quickly. They're sitting close enough so their legs touch, her bare skin up against his and he can smell the soft floral notes of her oils she

brought with her. He breathes in her scent and finds himself soothing the nerves that have been eating him alive for the past forty-eight hours.

“You know how you said our marriage wouldn’t be real when we first agreed to it?” Hyunjin asks. She gulps and nods softly. Hyunjin stares into her eyes, enough so he can see himself in her pupils. “It doesn’t seem that it’s that way.... fake.”

“Is that such a bad thing?” Valkyrie asks softly. He can hear the stubble anxiety in her tone and he reaches out his hand and grabs hers. “I am thinking it’s not such a bad thing,” Hyunjin mumbles.

“You wouldn’t be mad to have me as your wife... truly?”

Hyunjin smiles. “I couldn’t think of anyone better... truly,”

Valkyrie stares at him, her lips parting softly. Hyunjin’s hand lands on the nape of her neck, he shuffles a little bit and then he leaning down, his lips engulfing hers.

And unlike their kiss that sealed their marriage at the altar, it is sweet, meaningful. Odin’s words to him as they left echo through Hyunjin’s mind. That she is worth all the stars in the sky. The woman who had protected him without a second thought, her smaller frame powerful against anyone that proved a threat.

When he sleeps that night, the weight of her head on his chest is

comforting and in his sleep, he dreams of a bright smile, the silver ring glinting against her mouth.

→

Minho creaks open the door to Jisung's room. It's three in the morning but Minho has shifted and turned all night. They've been in Mydar for two weeks at this point, waiting for Jeongin to heal up before they can continue their journey because there is absolutely no way they wouldn't leave with one of their own.

But anxiety has consumed Minho. The construct of time, how it flows without a break, unforgiving to anything. Time goes on and with that their timeframe of gathering allies becomes smaller, by a few weeks but it is enough to cause an uneasy feeling churn in his gut.

There are pros and cons to every situation, and the pros at the moment are that Jisung and his daughter are reunited. He plays with her all day, she sleeps in his arms and they sleep together in the same bed. They took the big bed so Eunbyul was safe on the opposite side, away from any harm.

He gazes down at their sleeping faces and he smiles when he finds the uncanny resemblance between them. Puffed out cheeks, pouted lips and a fist resting on top of their chests.

The bed dips with his weight when he sits on the edge and Jisung slowly wakes. He whines out as he opens his eyes, squinting at him. "It's okay, it's just me," Minho whispers. "I just couldn't sleep," Jisung sits up and stares at him, sleepy. "So why come here?"

"I don't know," Minho mutters, honestly. Jisung scoots closer to Eunbyul to let Minho in. She's still far enough away, the bed large enough to fit the three of them comfortably. "Sleep now," Jisung pats him on the chest and in his half haze of sleep, he falls back under quickly.

Minho is comforted by their breathing, by Jisung's warmth that slides closer to him, snuggling up to his side.

He finally sleeps now, listening to his own beating heart.

→

Jisung is glad that they had stopped to go back to Mydar. He wasn't glad that it was because Jeongin was sick, he had been overtaken by fear that his friend wouldn't make it, but now he is back to his feet, the scar healing nicely, according to Hyunjin.

Eunbyul is almost seven months old and Jisung feels as if it was just

yesterday he saw her for the first time through the plane of glass, Minho right by his side.

She doesn't fit into his arms like she once did, and she heavier than he last recalled. Her smile is the same, blindly bright and Jisung's heart aches at how he has been away from her so long but she still smiles at him, unaware that he'll leave again soon.

Jisung wishes it didn't have to be this way, that he can see her each day but as much as he loves his tiny daughter, they will not win a fight against the Capital without a force equal or bigger than theirs.

It's the world against them and Jisung reminds himself that this is for her too. An overmorrow that is guaranteed.

He kisses her cheeks on the morning of their third week in Mydar before passing her off to Isa. She's happy in her grandmother's arms, but her eyes are big as she watches him leave. When he takes a few steps away, she bursts into tears, clawing at the air as if it'll bring her dad back to her.

Jisung stands there, frozen in place as he stares at her. Everyone else has boarded the ship, but he lingers. This time it is harder to leave because she understands that dad won't be around again. Jisung feels evil, leaving her crying in front of him.

He spins on his heels when his tears roll down his face. His legs feel so heavy, but he takes a single step closer to the ship although every inch of his being is telling him to run and comfort his baby.

A hand cups over his mouth as he sobs, his eyes shutting as the sound racks through him. He stands there, caught between too many emotions, too conflicted to see which way to go.

A soft hand encloses around his and he opens his eyes to see Valkyrie gazing at him softly. Her hand is warm in his and she takes a small step leading him away.

He follows her and he tries to drown out the sounds of Eunbyul screaming. He can hear Fern and Isa trying their best to comfort his distraught baby.

He leaps up into the ship and slides down the wall as soon as the doors shut, sobbing.

Valkyrie sits next to him in silence and Felix joins her on Jisung's other side. They sit like that for what feels like hours until Jisung is asleep, a frown etched on his face even in the soft abyss of sleep.

He's only awoken when he's in Minhø's arms, the older man just going to place him down on his bed to sleep more comfortably. "I have feet," Jisung murmurs and Minhø hums in response, placing him down on the soft mattress. "You were asleep. You would've ached all over if we just left you there,"

"Then I guess I should thank you?" Minhø shakes his head. "Just sleep," he whispers to him. "You don't owe me anything,"

And as he slips under the lull of sleep once more, Jisung knows that he owes Minho a lot of things. Too many things to count on all his fingers.

→

“You can ask me if you want,” Jeongin sighs out. Valkyrie gulps and shuffles closer to him. “I just... I know we’re not very close but I still... I guess I’m curious?”

He gazes at the woman who shifts in her seat. Jeongin can barely believe this is the same woman that had tackled Tenebris without a second thought as soon as she raised a hand against her husband.

“No one is asking how you feel... not mentally, at least...”

“Because they don’t have to,” Jeongin muses out and he watches as she frowns, confused. “Because I got the womb cut out of me?” Jeongin screws his nose up at it. Hyunjin comes around the corner, probably had been listening to his wife’s question before he decided to come out to sit with her.

“It wasn’t my choice to have it in the first place, you know that,” she nods. “I don’t feel any different,” he admits softly. “It won’t erase all

the years I spent growing it and being mutated, but I won't mourn over those years any more than I already have,"

"Most of the boys feel the same," Jeongin shrugs and Hyunjin nods.

"Jisung wanted it cut out of him as soon as he realised it could be a possibility," He says. "But he found out he was pregnant and everyone kind of forgot..."

"Felix would never," Seungmin adds on as he squeezes next to Jeongin. "Everyone knows he's the only one that wanted it in the first place... just none of us knew of their true intentions. We were kids. But I'm like Jeongin... I would part with it without much thought," his lips purse and his mind briefly flickers back to his mother and her wishes of a large, joyful family. His heart always aches for her, he yearns to know if she's still alive, even. And even though he doesn't care for his ability to bear children, it's the memories of his mother, so vibrant and loving. If Seungmin could just give her something back, maybe it's worth it?

Minho slips into the room, his lips still pulled into the same smile when he had lifted Jisung from the floor and carried him to his warm bed. "What are you guys talking about?"

"Our attachments to our wombs," Jeongin responds plainly. "Right, of course," Minho snorts. "Do you think Jisung feels differently about his now that Eunbyul is here?" Seungmin asks gently.

"There's no doubt," Jeongin responds. "Everyone knows how much he loves her,"

“But he loves her,” Minho comments. “Not the fact he carried her,”

“I was surprised how smoothly he transitioned into caring for her,” Hyunjin mutters. “It’s not a secret to know how much he struggled,”

“I’m proud of him,” Seungmin whispers and they hum.

“Where is your better half, hey?” Jeongin pokes Seungmin in the shoulder and the older man rolls his eyes. “To workout, he keeps complaining he’s going to forget how to run if he stays on the ship too long,”

“Sounds like him,” Minho laughs and waves goodbye to them. “I’m going to terrorise him— I mean workout!”

“Does anyone know where Felix and Chan have gone to anyways? I was going to help them in the kitchen tonight with making the roast we had in Scalva...” Valkyrie stands and the rest of them share a look around.

“Well if they’ve disappeared together...” Jeongin cringes and Seungmin screws his nose up at the thought. “It’s best to not look for them...”

“Oh be quiet,” Felix hisses as he slides around the corner. “I was taking a blanket off the beds because it’s not winter anymore and all

you bitches sleep like your tackling elephants in your sleep! Except for Jisung and Minho... although has anyone else heard Minho curse in his sleep before?"

"Oh yeah!" Jeongin cracks up. "I always knew he was hostile but it's something else when it transfers through sleep,"

"I can hear you!" Minho yells out and Jeongin makes a run for it.

→

Jisung wakes up to the screaming of no doubt Jeongin and Minho's cackling laughter. He hasn't slept for long in his bed but he gets up anyway, knowing he won't be able to sleep tonight if he does.

"Oh, you scared me!" Felix hisses at the end of his bed. Jisung jumps himself and frowns at his best friend. "What are you doing in here?"

Felix shrugs. "I took everyone's winter blanket off their beds. It's warmer now," Jisung just frowns at him but he knows better than to question his friend's antics.

"You have something on your mind," Felix sings as he jumps onto his

bed, capturing Jisung in a hug. “How do you always know?” Jisung whines. “You’re my best friend!” Felix reminds him, giving him an eye roll. Jisung sits up on his elbows and purses his lips in thought.

“Minho does a lot of things for me,” he concludes. Felix nods his head at him. “From the very beginning. Minho was the one to break me out of my room. He was there when I found out about Eunbyul, he told me about overmorrow,” Felix raises a brow at him.

“I owe him a lot. He’s always so good to me... I’m not quite sure how we’ve become such close friends but I’m not mad,” Felix stares at him blankly before he sighs.

“Maybe you need to think about this some more?” Felix suggests. “Like why do you think he treats you so well?”

“Because he values our friendship...?” Felix springs up from the bed and shrugs his shoulders. “Just think, Sungie,” he sighs before leaving. Jisung stares at the door.

Minho was the beginning of many things. When he thinks of the way his arms wrap around him so tenderly, his body sings with warmth. He gulps and thinks about the look in the elder's eyes, soft and tender around him and Eunbyul, but hard and angry at the rest of the world.

Jisung still finds him so confusing, there is still too much he doesn’t know about him, but he is endlessly intriguing.

“Jisung just asked me probably the most stupid thing to this date,” Felix sighs as he plonks himself on his and Chan’s bed. “What did he say?” Chan laughs and Felix peers up from his lashes, his lips pursed.

“He’s going on about how Minho is so nice to him... but other than that he’s absolutely clueless!”

“And it’s not like Minho’s even trying to hide his feelings anymore,” Chan sighs and Felix nods his head. He leans down for a swift kiss, rolling over his boyfriend to tuck himself close to the wall. “It’s almost painful to watch him pine over him,” Felix whines. Chan hums, his fingers slowly creeping up his exposed skin against his abdomen.

“I’m sure it won’t take him much longer to figure it all out,” Chan whispers. Felix sighs and shrugs. “I can only hope. I’ll lose my mind if it doesn’t happen soon,”

Chan laughs before kissing him deeply, his fingers tangling in his pale hair.

→

A week and a half later, they've reached the other side of the hemisphere for the first time in their journey. The colder air they felt against the windows has gone in turn for the glass warm to the touch, the sun a bright golden and shining bright, no clouds to cover its rays.

Jeongin cries out as he loses the game of cards he, Seungmin, Changbin and Felix are playing. Changbin pokes him in the ribs and Jeongin retaliates by kicking him in the shoulder. Jisung sighs and shakes his head at them over Hyunjin's notebook.

He's been trying to learn how to read and write these days when they have nothing else to do. It's not been easy, but he can read simple sentences now and recently learnt how to spell everyone's name. He hasn't been able to stop filling pages with 'Eunbyul' all over them.

He calls in every day, watching her do her usual things, sleeping, playing with her bear and a few other toys Isa brought for her. She gets upset every time they say their goodbyes and it breaks Jisung's heart all over again.

Hyunjin and Valkyrie are cooped up in their shared room as they have for the past week. Valkyrie has been intrigued by her husband's skill in healing and Hyunjin had noticed it and offered to teach her. She took the offer up quickly and that's what the both of them have been doing with their free time lately.

Everyone has seen the two of them becoming more comfortable in each other's presence. Jisung is glad Hyunjin has found someone to offer comfort and warmth to, someone who gives that back without

any second thought. Valkyrie is very fond of him, Jisung knows that much. The way she looks at him and how she shuffles closer to him, her hand brushing his until he gently takes it into his larger hand.

Just as Jisung stands from the lounge, the lights flicker, turning off for a few milliseconds. He frowns and the others on the floor halt their antics for a bit.

“That’s strange,” Changbin mutters. “The lights have never done that before,”

Just as he speaks a clunking sound trembles through the ship, something shifting beneath their feet. Valkyrie bursts out of her room, Hyunjin following, their hands held tightly together.

“Minho!” Chan shouts out just before a screeching noise sounds out. They bolt to the control room, where Minho is frantically pulling on the controls, pressing different buttons.

“What’s going on?” The sun is setting, the sky in hues of pinks and purples, but no one can focus on the hues of the sky with the screeching noise and the unsteady clunking underneath their feet.

“We’re going down!” Minho yells out, leaping from his chair. The big window in front of them tips its view from the sky to the sand dunes down below. There’s nothing else in the control room except for the panels and the single chair, so it’s the safest place for them to be for a crash. The glass of the windows are thick, stronger and more durable than normal windows and Minho hopes it is strong enough to withstand the impact of a crash.

Adrenaline flood everyone's veins mixed in with fear. They grab onto each other and when they feel the sickening weightlessness of their stomachs, they scream, gripping on tighter and tighter.

The crash comes with a shockwave through the entire ship. Their bodies fly around, hitting walls, each other and Jisung watches with wide eyes as Valkyrie's head collides against the control panels, her lithe frame tumbling to the ground, unmoving just before he loses his consciousness.

→

Jisung wakes to darkness.

He groans as his eyes open, an ache blasts at his neck when he moves and he winces, but once he stretches out, the pain is gone. He feels okay other than that, and now he can tell that he's the only one that's conscious at the moment. The window is covered in something, buried in a dune of sand he supposes, but it's too dark to tell.

He struggles to his feet, the floor of the ship on an angle due to the way it has crashed into the earth.

He slips but gains his balance quicker than he had expected.

“Valkyrie!” He hisses out. The young woman is laying across the control panel, her pale locks caked with red blood. He hurries over, pressing his fingers to her forehead over her nose and he feels a knot in his throat smooth out when he feels soft breaths against his fingers. He leaves her be for now, ducking to find Changbin coming to beside the control panel.

“Binnie!” Jisung leaps down to help him up. “Oh my god, are you okay?” Changbin pulls him in for a brief hug. “I’m okay, I’m okay. What about you?”

“I’m fine,” Changbin answers back. “What about everyone else?”

“All unconscious. Valkyrie’s bleeding but I don’t think anyone else is,” A loud groan is heard as someone thuds to their feet. “Jisung?”

“Minho, oh thank god,” the elder hauls himself to his feet, squinting. “My head hurts like a bitch,” he mutters.

“Seungmin,” Changbin gently shakes his partner, he stirs and Changbin helps him up. Chan rises next, clutching his knee, the pant leg had ripped open somehow and there's a deep cut that hinders him from being able to walk well. Jisung helps Felix up, his left ankle most likely sprained. Hyunjin wakes then, luckily their medic not injured. Jeongin looks as if his wrist is sprained as well but other than that he is fine.

The only one that hasn’t woken is Valkyrie, in the same position

when Jisung last checked on her.

“She’s bleeding,” Jisung tells her husband who leaps towards her.

“Minho can you get the door open?” Hyunjin asks him hurriedly. He picks Valkyrie up from her place on the control panel and lays her on the floor, trying to keep her head elevated.

“The electricity is out,” he replies. “But maybe with the manpower we could?”

“We can only try,” Hyunjin agrees, standing to try to help pry the door open. “The first aid things are out there,” they all help, except for Jeongin who is staying with Valkyrie, brushing her matted hair out of her face.

With a heave and a loud creaking sound, the doors crack open and Hyunjin runs out quickly, retuning mere moments later with their largest first aid kit.

“There’s everything in here. Felix, you know how to wrap bandages and clean wounds right?” The younger male nods and Hyunjin sighs out in relief. “Anyone who has cuts go to Felix, Jeongin Felix can wrap up your wrist and give you the sling,”

“My old friend,” he sighs and they all wince at the memory of their capsized boat somewhere in the ocean, off the coast of Mydar’s continent.

Felix wraps Jeongin's wrist quickly before passing Jisung the sling for him to help him into. Chan's knee is cleaned and bandaged, Seungmin finds a gash in his shoulder that gets cleaned thoroughly. They had all had their tetanus shot, the four that had been in the facility had been vaccinated against pretty much everything, but that won't save them from a festering wound.

Minho's hand has a gash through his palm, deep and sticky with already dried up blood. Jisung holds his other hand when Felix cleans it, the elder hissing through clenched teeth.

"How is she?" Jisung crawls over to the married couple, her head rested in Hyunjin's lap as he inspects the laceration. "It's deep for a head wound," Hyunjin mutters. "I don't know if she has a fracture... can't tell without an X-ray," he pauses and sighs looking down at her. "Does anyone have a better light source than the dying flashlight?" Hyunjin asks them all.

No one has anything else and he purses his lips and passes the flashlight to Jisung. "Hold it over her head, please,"

"What are you going to do?" Jisung asks him, he looks down at Valkyrie, seeing the thick cut from her left temple down, underneath her eye, just narrowly missing her eye socket, down to her nostril. His lips part as he looks at her.

"She needs stitches along her cheekbone, it's too deep there,"

“You’re doing it while she’s unconscious still?” Jeongin questions. “Well, I think its better than having her awake while I’m sewing her flesh back together,”

They wince and Jisung keeps his arm steady as soon as Hyunjin cleans the needle and disinfects her wound. “What happens if she wakes up?” Felix asks gingerly just before Hyunjin starts. He looks up and eyes his longtime friends. Chan crawls over, his bad knee lifted from the ground. “I’ll hold her down, just in case,” Hyunjin nods and pulls the needle through. Jisung gulps as he watches, but he doesn’t falter. Jisung’s seen his fair share of blood and injuries and once it had triggered memories of his miscarriage, but over time it has gotten easier.

He had ripped his tracker out with his iv needle after all, so it would be strange if he was queasy now. She doesn’t stir at all and Jisung finds concern all over Hyunjin’s face after he’s done.

“That’s not good, isn’t it?” Chan whispers and Hyunjin nods his head once, stroking the side of her face gently.

“We should find out where we are,” Seungmin speaks up. “If we’re in the middle of a desert without anywhere to go... we’re not only going to run out of food but we’re going to run out of water sooner than later,”

“What about the signals for the calling devices? Can we call Fern for a back up ship?” Changbin questions and they all turn to Minho. “We can try, but I don’t know if we’ll get a signal. Besides, if they can send someone out, we don’t have our coordinates to send to them,”

“The signal isn’t working, anyway,” Felix sighs and he drops the device from his hand. It rolls down the angled floor.

“We have to get the big doors open,” Seungmin stands. “We can’t stay in here,”

“Most of us are injured, though. We don’t have enough people to carry the injured,” Hyunjin reminds. “I can walk,” Chan says and they all turn to glare at him. He blinks and shrinks into himself. “Stop kidding yourself,” Minho tells him.

“Changbin, Seungmin and I will go,” Minho stands with the other two. “You too, Jisung,” He stands too, hurrying to them.

“I can at least help you get the doors open?” Chan speaks but Hyunjin gets up before him, offering to do it. “Just rest, Chan,” Jisung tells him. “You’ll be fine here.”

He tries to protest, but Felix shuffles over, laying across his lap. Jisung smiles softly before running throughout the dark ship to help to pry the doors open.

“Fuck these are a lot heavier,” Minho speaks through gritted teeth. Jisung looks up from his position crouched down and sees his biceps bulging, defined muscles shaking. He had thrown his jacket somewhere in favour of the sleeveless shirt he acquired in Mydar at some point.

“It’s moving!” Seungmin grits out and with a final heave from them, the doors crack open. Minhø grips them and pulls them apart. Sunlight blasts down at them and they all squint at the unwelcome brightness.

“We must’ve been out all night...” Jisung mutters.

Seungmin grips onto his shirt and pulls him back in suddenly. He falls back onto his butt, in shock at his friend.

“How the fuck...” Hyunjin murmurs. They’re suspended in the air at least fifty meters from the ground. Most of the ship is probably buried in the sand dune to keep it at such an angle.

“I don’t know if we have a rope that long...” Changbin whispers. Jisung goes to fumble in the kitchen cupboards where they keep certain supplies that definitely don’t belong in a typical kitchen.

“There’s rope,” he squints at the bright yellow tag, “Fifty meters...”

“I have an idea,” Minhø mutters. They all look at him through squinted eyes.

Minhø ties the rope to the sensor bar beneath the door, a strong pole that should hold their weight. The rope doesn’t reach the ground, but the drop is much less than what it is from up from the ship.

“So we just climb... and then jump? How do we get back up?”

“I guess we build a fucking huge sandcastle,” Minho answers Jisung’s question. Jisung stares at him. “Okay. That works. Let’s go,”

Minho goes first, lowering himself down the rope until the end and jumping down onto the sand. He lands fine and soon they’re all out there, uncomfortably warm already in the sun.

“Which way now?” Changbin asks them all. Seungmin shrugs, beginning to walk away. But they hear Hyunjin shouting and they turn to him. He’s pointing ahead in the distance, looking panicked. He’s signalling for them to come back up. And quickly.

“Maybe it’s time to build that sandcastle?” Minho muses. Jisung runs to underneath the rope and begins piling sand. Seungmin and Changbin hurry to help while Minho tries to figure out what Hyunjin was pointing to.

From Hyunjin’s view, he saw them before Minho did. Four camels, a rider on each. Minho’s eyes widen and he rushes to his friends. He turns back and sees them gaining on them fast. “Riders,” he spits out. Jisung peers up at him through his lashes.

“What if they’ll hurt us like last time?” He panics and stands. “I don’t have another flare!” Minho clutches his hand. “I have a gun, there’s only four of them.”

“And us and a broken ship!” Changbin spits out.

“They’re coming!” Jisung hisses, clutching Minhoo’s hand tighter.

It seems like mere moments before they’re in front of the four of them.

“We saw your ship fall from the sky last night,” A masculine voice sounds out. A man pulls the fabric covering his lower face off to reveal a tall nose and thin lips. His brown eyes are kind and he slowly gets off his camel. A woman follows him, her veil pinned in place in her topknot.

“We came for survivors,” she speaks calmly, obviously noticing their fear. Minhoo seems to relax slightly.

“Nine of us. One of us is unconscious,” Seungmin says. Minhoo shoots him a look but Seungmin glares at him. “They’re friendly,” he whispers in a low hiss.

“Two more can fit on each camel. It has turned out well,” the man smiles. “We will take you to the city. We shall wait for you to bring out your injured,”

Changbin tilts his head up to the ship. “Hyunjin!” The man pokes his head back out, his eyes softer in recognition that these people aren’t

the threat they all had expected. “Can you get Valkyrie down here?” He gives them a nod in response before disappearing.

“We will spare the questions for the city,” The woman speaks as she pats her camel's nose. “You are in safe hands,”

Hyunjin scales down the rope with one arm and his feet, his other arm keeping Valkyrie in place over his shoulder. Minho meets him at the bottom, grabbing onto the unconscious woman while he jumps down and takes her into his arms more comfortably this time.

“Is this the injured one?” The woman asks. The two behind her are much younger Jisung realises. Maybe their children or younger disciples. “The most injured,” Hyunjin tells them. He holds his wife close, even in the desert heat.

The rest get down pretty easily. Felix helps Jeongin down with his one arm, but both come down in the same shape they were up in the ship.

The two riders at the back hop off their camels, tap them twice on their noses for them to lay down. The elder couple does the same.

“Hop on,” The man smiles. “It’s almost a full suns ride to the City of Sivra,”

Minho takes Jisung’s hand and leads him to a camel. “You heard the man,” Minho smiles at him, bright underneath the unshielded sun of

the desert. He glows in a golden sheen and Jisung feels his heart flutter in his chest, his breath shuddering.

Something blooms in his stomach, hot and it washes over him, his skin suddenly hot. He grips harder onto Minho's hand, relishing the way his palm fits against his.

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Notes for the Chapter:

These few chapters have been BIG and the next four or so are also big ones :ppp

SO thank you to everyone who left comments last chapter! I'm really thankful for it and the confirmation that the slow burn isn't too much etc!! You're all so sweet!! And I'm so glad everyone is liking Valkyrie! This arc in the City of Sivra is longer than other settlement arcs... and theres a few reasons!! Lots of things happen here and I'm so excited and I just know some of u are going to scream with me sooner rather than later!! (In a good way or a bad way?? I shall not say :PPP)

The rocking of her body wakes her slowly. Her mind is hazy when she begins to flow back into consciousness. Her body is numb, only the tips of her fingers tingling like crackling hearth fires she used to sit around as a child, listening to her grandmother tell grand tales of adventure.

Feeling slowly starts seeping back through her, her toes to her calves, her thighs— pressed against something that is swaying her body around. Her stomach churns with the feeling and when she finally opens her eyes, sunlight beams down into her sensitive eyes and she presses the back of her head to something warm and hard. A groan passes through her lips and then she feels the throbbing pain drumming throughout her skull, the tenderness and sting along her face.

“Hey, hey,” Hyunjin’s hand is warm in hers, almost too much but he squeezes her hand reassuringly. “You’re awake now?” She groans again in response. The sun is hot, and when her back arches in discomfort against Hyunjin’s chest, he reaches his arm out, holding onto a jacket, shielding her sensitive skin from the bright sun. She relaxes a bit, cooler in the shade.

“What happened?” She croaks out, her throat dry and sore. “We crashed,” Hyunjin tells her. “All of us were out for a while. It was inevitable to not hit our heads on the impact... some of us were injured quite a bit,” her head tilts the slightest bit, and the stinging in her face returns, stronger and her head pounding. She shuts her eyes, feeling her stomach toss. “You got the shorter end of the stick, that’s for sure,” Hyunjin tells her gently. His free hand strokes her hair gently, untangling the matted braids in her pale locks.

“Where are we going now?” She asks softly, leaving her body relax a bit more. Hyunjin’s words are blurred. She can hear him talking, but she can’t seem to process exactly what he said. All she knows is that she’s hurt, and the constant pain her body roars at her reminds her of that with each small movement.

“The City of Sivra,” Hyunjin tells her and in her confused mind, she

finds the tone of his voice a lulling song, something to sing her to sleep.

He smiles down at her, his thumb brushing over her unmarred cheek, his touch lingering.

“We will arrive in an hour or so,” The man leading the camel tells them all. “The lady will have lodgings to rest in every shortly,”

“Thank you,” Hyunjin murmurs back. His arm begins to ache from holding up his jacket to shade his wife, but he doesn’t drop his arm, he keeps it up, trying to protect both her wound from strong sun rays and her pale complexion, used to snowy areas and pale sunlight, not the golden sheen of the desert.

The sun moves around them as time goes on. It falls slowly, its course of light changing. With the sun falling, midday turning into late afternoon, the silhouette of a city becomes visible on the horizon.

It becomes clear as the camels travel over shifting sand dunes that the city in front of them is unlike anything they’ve seen before. Tall walls of sandstone line the edges of the city, but tall towers loom over the city, domed roofs of metal and bright white glinting in the warm bronze sunlight. The city stretches on and on, it almost looks endless.

The gates become clearer as they get closer and when they arrive at the gates of bronze metal contorted into shapes of lotus flowers and twirled lines, Jisung notices a screen, blue and reflecting its light on the sand below. It flickers once, turning pale blue before flickering green and then a clicking sound fills his ears. He and Felix lock eyes.

“We will take you only to the stables to put the camels away. The inn is not too far away from there,” The quieter woman says as she leads her camel into the closed gates. They open as soon as the camel is a step away, springing back as if a magnet pulls them open. Minho makes a small noise of amusement and Jisung finds it endearing.

The city is bustling as they enter. Jisung sees marketplaces in the near distance, bright coloured fabrics drooping from building to

building to create a colourful canopy to keep shoppers out of the sun's rays. He notices a tall tower, its domed roof glittering with green jewels, but that's not what attracts his eye. It's the screen covering the body of the tower, flickering to show some type of advertisement for food stalls. His stomach growls at him and he purses his lips. They had eaten almost twenty-four hours ago and he can feel the exhaustion null away into his bones. They didn't have much water to share around during the ride either so everything is catching up on them all. The crash did its toll on them all and the added low energy from lack of food and water makes him feel as if getting off the camel is a huge task.

The stables are large, enough so that fifty odd camels could fit comfortably. There's technology scattered around everywhere, screens filled with what he presumes is camel information written in script Jisung can't read. Not that he can read their common language well either.

The camels drop down again and Jisung hauls himself off, his butt rather sore from the long ride. Jisung hurries over to Felix to help him off, offering his shoulder for him to wrap his arm around to steady himself better. Minho goes to help Chan, his arm wrapping around his best friend's waist, helping him limp along.

"We don't have any money," Chan whispers but everyone hears his worry. "Not this currency at least," Jeongin adds on. Hyunjin slides an arm under Valkyrie's knees, the other behind her shoulder blades, her head laying against his chest. Jisung knows Hyunjin is just as exhausted as he is, but he powers on, standing tall for his injured wife in his arms.

"I'm sure we can figure something out when we get to the inn," He says just as the four people return from taking their camels back to feed and water them.

"Which inn would fit you all? A simple bed and bath or accommodation and food?" They all look to Chan who flushes, scratching at his nape.

"What's the cheapest option?" He asks softly. The older woman removes the veil covering her mouth and smiles at them. "Mother

Barbada's would be the best bet, perhaps?"

The man next to her raises a brow. "Mother Barbada? Isn't she getting too old to run a tavern?"

"You tell her that," The woman scoffs and elbows him in the ribs. She turns to smile at them all. "If you will follow me," she gestures in front of her and they follow after her like baby ducklings following a mother duck Jisung had seen in the river when he was pregnant.

The sky turns a dusty pink and lilac, the sun a lone golden orb falling into the horizon. The city is still busy, people adorned in bright fabrics embellished with jewels and shining threads hover around and Jisung's eyes flicker around, taking in the sheer heavily decorated head veils the women are wearing, and the bright and glittering fabric wrapped around more than half of the men's heads.

She stops in front of a building with a few steps leading up to an arched entryway, bedazzled with red and blue stones. "I must leave to take care of my own problems. Tell Mother Barbada that Cala sends her blessings,"

She disappears quickly, leaving them standing outside the threshold to the building.

"So," Jisung clears his throat. "Are we going to go in or not?" Hyunjin goes up first, carrying his unconscious wife into the building. They follow after him, stopping in their tracks to gaze around the place.

"I've never seen something like this," Seungmin murmurs. "Even in books or texts..."

The entry room is circular, with a fountain in the middle of the room, plants growing all around. The tiled floors click underneath their shoes. "There's a door ahead," Changbin mutters. "I guess that's where we're supposed to go?"

"Your guess is as good as the rest of ours," Minho muses and heads straight towards the large doors set into white stone, dark and carved with pictures of lotus flowers and other plants Jisung hasn't seen

before.

The large doors creak open as Minho and Chan push them open. It opens up to a wider space, an open ceiling with tall trees growing to offer shade when it is sunny. Jisung spots another entryway that's undercover and he wanders over to it, still looking around in awe at the beauty of the place. "Oh!" He exclaims and gestures for his friends to come over.

"I think this is it." It leads to an enclosed area made of sandstone and Jisung slowly walks in, finding a set of stairs and a hallway with a few doors scattered down it. A soft creak sounds out and they look around to find a woman, in her sixties or early seventies peering up at them from the hallway.

"Guests!" She cheers and hurries over. "Oh dear, look at all of you! Come children, I have many rooms for you all," She hurries them to follow her. She turns suddenly and looks at Hyunjin, her dark eyes landing on Valkyrie. "Oh. Is the lady injured?"

"Quite so," Jeongin answers her. Her eyes soften and she hums. "Come, young man, I'll get you a room first," she rushes along, her words even hurried. "Are you Mother Barbada?" Chan asks quickly and she stares at him for a moment before nodding. "Of course I am,"

"Do we... not have to pay..." Felix whispers. Her eyes crinkle. "We shall get you settled in first and then we talk later after you are all well looked after. Now, my boy, this room here, quickly!" Hyunjin hurries after her, into a room with a large bed that is much bigger than the biggest bed on their ship.

He gets his wife onto the soft mattress, his arms burning and aching as he slumps down next to her. "I will bring water to wash her up with after I take everyone to a room," Mother Barbada rushes out and Hyunjin's eyes linger where she had been. For an elderly woman, she sure gets around quickly.

"So, my boys would you like your own rooms?" They peer at each other, back to the old woman. Jisung shakes his head, adamant to not be by himself. He hasn't been alone ever since the institution and the

thought of an empty space with him just filling it sends shivers down his spine. He's been alone long enough to last a lifetime.

"I wouldn't mind a room to myself," Jeongin speaks up too. Jisung knows he values his own space and he feels bad that he hasn't been able to indulge in that recently.

"Pairs I'm assuming then for the rest of you?" She gestures to Changbin and Seungmin clutching onto each other and her eyes linger on Felix and Jisung who shake their heads at the woman with widened eyes. She laughs and gestures for them to follow.

She gets Seungmin and Changbin in the very last room in that same hallway, a few doors down from Hyunjin and Valkyrie. She leaves them be with the promise of food soon and shoves Jeongin into the room on the last left, near Seungmin and Changbin.

"Now, you four who is with who?"

It's rather odd, this whole situation but they've had their fair share of weird things happening so they don't really bat an eyelash. They're mostly too tired and hungry to care, as well.

Chan reaches for Felix's hand and she nods. "Leg injuries, I see. This room at the front of the hall, then. The least walking required!" Minho and Jisung let go of them hesitantly and watch them hobble in, Chan trying to walk better to help Felix to the bed.

The old woman spins on her heels, beady eyes starring up at the two of them. Minho clutches Jisung's hand and squeezes it. "Now, you two," she clicks her fingers and begins up the set of carved out sandstone stairs.

"Mother Barbada," Jisung calls out, climbing after her. She turns to look at him, a kind smile over her face. "Don't we need to do anything for you to allow us to stay?" He asks her rather meekly because they definitely don't have money to give her, but maybe payment of labour would be necessary. Although most of them will need to rest to heal up before they could do that.

"Oh, child. I sense the urgency in you all," Minho shoots a look to

Jisung. “You do not have to be wary,” she says to Minho. “They call me many names here. Mother Barbada, Seer of the Fates, many, many names,”

Jisung blinks. “You are a seer?”

“I wouldn’t call myself that,” she shrugs and continues back up the stairs. “I saw the ship fall. Most people did. You all look outlandish, especially the girl you travel with, I have not seen such light hair in my life,”

She then gestures to the open door for them to enter. “I will return shortly. Rest your worried minds. All is well here. You are safe.” She closes the door on them both with a soft click. Jisung turns to Minho slowly.

Moonlight pours in from a large window, casting soft shadows over the room. Leaves from potted plants all over the room gently sway from the calm breeze let in by the opened window.

“We have our own beds,” Jisung muses. “That’s a first,” he hops on over to the one closest to the window and starfishes himself over it. “We do,” Minho replies and Jisung swears he sounds a little disappointed.

“I’ve never imagined such a place to exist,” Minho whispers as he gazes out of the window. Soft blue light flickers occasionally over his face, from the billboards in the distance before it stops altogether. Minho lets out a breath and Jisung tears his eyes off of the man in front of him. He didn’t realise he had been staring with such intensity either. It seems Minho didn’t notice, too.

He peers out of the window to find the city below drenched in moonlight, the jewels and precious metals glinting like the stars themselves. “It’s beautiful,” Jisung mutters before looking up at Minho who’s staring right down at him, a soft smile across his face.

Valkyrie finally stirs again when Hyunjin gently takes her leather corset off. Her eyes are squinted at first until she gets used to the soft light of the lantern Mother Barbada brought in on his request.

“It feels like someone has thrown their battle axe at my head,” She croaks out and Hyunjin stokes the unmarred side of her face fondly. “You probably did hit your head with a similar intensity,” he grimaces as he says it. He knows she’ll be badly concussed for a few days, but she seems a lot better already than he thought.

“I feel gross,” she whispers out. “And I smell like... dusty horse,”

“I think you find that's camel that you're smelling,” Hyunjin chuckles. She frowns before letting out a small hiss of pain when it tugs on the stitches in her cheek. “I don't even know what that is,”

“I know,” he gently lifts her up taking the thin jacket off her shoulders. It had been hot in the desert, unlike anything Hyunjin had felt before but he didn't know the extent of her injuries and didn't want to hurt her further by manoeuvring her around to get her out of outer layers. “When you're feeling better I'll take you to see them,”

“Sounds like a plan,” she mutters. It's quiet for a bit before she gulps and opens her eyes enough to meet his gaze. Her eyes are slightly unfocused, but it's to be expected. “My face,” she whispers out. “It's not good isn't it?”

Hyunjin stares down at her and smiles softly. The wound is puffed slightly from the stitches and it's bright red from her temple to almost at her left nostril. Bruises have bloomed at the corner of her left eye. He shakes his head. “It won't change anything,” he mutters. And he knows that it might take her some time before she gets used to the wound that will scar across her otherwise smooth skin. But she is still the woman she was when they met in the forest. Still, the woman who he married, who sleeps so peacefully next to him.

She is still the woman he loves.

“Would you like a bath? The lady has filled it up for you already,” He asks and she hums in response, lifting her arms weakly above her head. He blinks at her for a few short moments before his fingers

clutch the hem of her dirtied once white blouse and lifts it over her head in a gentle movement. She leans forwards, her bare chest touching to his bare skin from where he had unbuttoned his shirt on the camel a while ago. He would be flustered if it was a different situation, a different time where his wife wasn't hurting. He doesn't make her walk, knowing his own exhaustion is not near the level of battling a concussion and a throbbing wound. The tub is large, made of a polished stone, lit candles burning around the edge with a few bottles of liquid soap.

He sits her on the edge of the bath, helping her out of her pants and boots. She wiggles her toes when they're free and carefully, he leads her into the water, holding onto her left hand.

"Hyunjin?" She whispers softly, her eyes slowly falling shut. "Where are we?" He purses his lips and brushes his plush lips over the soft skin on her hand. "The City of Sivra," he tells her. "In an inn that an older lady owns,"

"It is very nice," she mutters. "But I just want to sleep,"

"Have some water first," he quickly goes to get the pitcher of water and a cup and presses it to her lips. "Then you can sleep, okay?"

She takes a few sips before drinking the whole cup before slumping into sleep again.

Hyunjin sighs. Their journeys have never been easy. But this, a crashed ship in a sand dune with no signal to call Fern and Isa for help, his friends and wife injured was something else they didn't even think of happening.

At least the City of Sivra is beautiful because it looks like they'll be here for quite some time.

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Warm sunlight wakes Jisung in the morning.

He stirs in his bed, the thin sheets tangled around his legs as he sits, gazing out of the window, down at the streets slowly filling.

He looks across the room to find Minho still fast asleep, his lips pouty in sleep. He smiles at him, a small giggle escaping his lips as he looks at him. He has slept with Minho more times than he can count on his fingers and toes but he had never seen him in such a peaceful state. He always woke earlier or it was too dark to admire him.

His fingertips trail over the sheets, feeling the silky material beneath his skin once last time as he stands out of bed. They had brought only a few things along with them, not expecting to be riding into a settlement when they first got to the ground, but Hyunjin had scampered around, filling a few bags with a few necessities. Spare shirts, they counted eight, someone had to miss out— Hyunjin sacrificed himself, saying he'd be fine. A bag of money they had been given by Fern as if they could use it somewhere. Jisung doubts anyone else has ever seen it, but Fern had shrugged and given to them nonetheless. Money was almost useless in Mydar. Trade and gifts were much more common than the money system.

He brought three guns, all of them still packed away in the bottom of one of the bags. A safety precaution. The first aid kits are in Hyunjin and Valkyrie's room which makes the most sense to Jisung.

He wanders down the stairs, his eyes flickering around to all the decor of the inn. The jewels shine in the morning light, the walls turned golden from the sun. He bumps into someone when his bare feet scuff over the lower floor and he looks up, finding Hyunjin frowning gently.

"Good morning," Jisung greets him quietly. "Is she okay?" He adds soon after and he watches as his friend sighs and slowly nods his head. "She'll be okay. Just going through the typical symptoms of a head injury,"

He rubs at his temples. "I couldn't sleep well last night. I feel horrible that I can't do much to help her," Jisung pats his arm softly, his eyes

gentle as he looks at him in the eye. "Is Minho awake yet?" Hyunjin then asks. Jisung shakes his head and the elder sighs. "I need to ask him to fix the signals on the devices so we can call Fern. We need a new ship,"

"They said they didn't have one big enough... the one we had was the biggest... Even if they can send people out to rescue us, that ship would run out of fuel and because the weight limit would be nearing capacity and we could go down in the ocean next time,"

Hyunjin's mouth turns into a thin line. "You can tell you've spent an exceptional amount of time with Minho,"

"Oh, dear boys, breakfast is almost ready! Go get the others to eat!" Mother Barbada comes in with a metal spoon in her hand. A yellow veil is pinned over her head, glass beads framing the edges that clink together with her movements. Her dress is a pale yellow, decorated with light blue beads and sparkling gemstones. She hurries away back to the kitchens.

"I'll go wake him up, then," Jisung shrugs.

Mother Barbada feeds them all until they feel close to exploding. Jisung is leaned back on the wooden bench they sit at, holding his stomach with two hands. Mother Barbada is babbling on about eating more but Jisung can not possibly manage another bite, no matter how good her cooking is.

"Mother Barbada," Chan calls out, stopping her in her fuss over Seungmin. Her eyes flicker to him, waiting.

"We are so grateful for your kind heart to let us stay here, and we hope we can for our stay here... but how would we get the attention of the cities leaders?"

She purses her lips, blinks a few times before putting her serving spoon down. "Why you would demand it, of course!" She cheers and then laughs before elaborating, "The royals are a hard group to get a meeting with. Especially outsiders like you, but I would imagine you will be called instead of you asking to see them,"

Chan just looks at her and no one else says anything. “Your ship crashed,” she reminds, looking over to Valkyrie tucked to Hyunjin’s side, her head tucked on his shoulder. “In the night. It looked like a bright star falling until reports from people from the outskirts said it looked like a ship,”

“Wait,” Minho suddenly says. “You say that as if everyone knows what a ship looks like?”

Mother Barbada shrugs her bony shoulders. “We do not have such things, but we have technologies similar. They called it a flying vehicle of some sort. No one really knows what your type of ‘ship’ is,”

Minho’s shoulders deflate. Jisung knows he was hoping they’d have ships to spare, so they could return to Mydar in one piece quickly.

“We shall wait for a call, then,” Mother Barbada concludes with a clap off her hands. “I will tell you all as soon as it arrives. Now the few of you uninjured ones, come help me clean up,”

“You’re scrubbing that bowl pretty rough,” Jisung teases Minho with a nudge to his ribs. The elder turns to him, plonking the wooden bowl in the drying rack.

“Sand dunes shift every day, Jisung,” he says and Jisung blinks at him, not sure where this is going. “The ship could be under a whole mountain of sand, or it could be free but we all know the possibilities of that are near zero because of our luck,” Jisung bites down onto his lip. “Right...” He mutters. “So what do we do then? It’s not like we could dig it out ourselves?” Minho sighs loudly, his fingers rubbing at his temples. Jisung purses his lips, his hands softly reaching to rub his arm tenderly.

The call comes midday on their fifth day with Mother Barbada.

She breaks through the doors of the foyer, the palm trees leaves trashing with the breeze, a piece of paper fluttering in her hand.

“Boys! My dear boys!” She cries at Minho and Changbin who were hovering around the fountain, dipping their hands and cooling their warm cheeks after exercising together.

“It has arrived!” She smiles broadly, showing them both the letter. They share glances and both smile widely themselves. “You are called to the palace in the morning of tomorrow,”

“We should tell the others!” Changbin hurries into the living quarters, screaming at all the rest of them. Hyunjin crashes out of his room, glaring at his friend. “Shh!” He hisses. “My wife is sleeping!”

“But the notice has been finally given to us! We might be able to make it back and not be stranded without correspondence!” Jisung pokes his head out from the staircase, eyes wide. Felix follows him, his jaw slacked. They had been in Jisung’s room, Felix teaching Jisung a few more words, teaching him how to write everyone’s name — including Valkyrie’s.

Mother Barbada appears with Minho, her brows furrowed neatly.

“You cannot go in these clothes you all wear,” she scrunches up her nose at them all. All they have are old, worn clothes, some with rips from sharp branches or falls they had along their journey. They’re not in great condition at all, but they look like a herd of black sheep among glittering flowers in the bustling streets. They hadn’t been out much at all.

Most of their injuries have healed well. Chan’s knee doesn’t bother him much anymore and Felix can now walk well, mostly healed after a few days off his feet. Jeongin’s wrist is still a bit sore, but other than that he’s all good. Valkyrie had suffered the most since they got here, pounding headaches and a severe concussion, her facial wound

tender and sore. Her wound is still healing, and it will for at least a few more weeks but her concussion has lifted now.

“I must fix that issue. I cannot have you all sauntering into the palace looking like sewer rats,” Hyunjin scoffs at her. “I don’t think we look that bad!” She rakes her eyes over him and grimaces. “Lots of work to do,” She tuts, walking away.

Jisung snickers under his breath.

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“Arms up!” Mother Barbada taps Jisung arms and he lifts them above his head, feeling the shifting of material as she pulls on the garment onto his body.

“Now you will look great in yellow,” she sings as she works the layers of fabric around his body. She flips one side over his shoulder, the other tucking near his hip before going pinning another piece of fabric to his head that falls to his mid-back. The fabric is decorated with gold and emerald green and when he opens his eyes to look at himself in the brass mirror all he can think of is his daughter's eyes. His heart aches, missing her so much.

“My daughter looked so beautiful in yellow,” he mutters and Mother Barbada’s ears pick it up. She stares at him, surprised. “You are young to have sired a child,” she comments and Jisung turns back to her. “I bore her,” he tells her plainly. It bothers him slightly that when people learn of his daughter, they automatically think he had sired her, and not done everything he had. Not that it is their fault, it's not a typical situation, he's very aware of that.

She looks at him. “Child, I believe the reason you are here is not something trivial,” she gulps out and Jisung hums lightly, nodding his head. “It is important,” he says. “Heavy on my shoulders,” he

mutters and her hand cups his cheek gently. "You are a strong one." She whispers. "I have known you for a small amount of time, but I know you are as strong as the metals they forge in the hottest furnaces," he blinks at her before smiling softly.

"Thank you, Mother Barbada," he runs his thumb down her veiny hand. He gazes into her deep brown eyes, old and wise. "I won't forget what you said,"

"Now go," she pats him on the back. "All your friends are waiting for you. Go do what you must to save what you must," he nods and smiles at her once more before meeting his friends at the bottom of the staircase.

"Where's everyone else?" Jisung asks Felix, Valkyrie and Hyunjin. Felix points outside. "They've been itching to get out," Valkyrie says. Jisung gazes at her. Her hair is braided at the sides as it usually is, but her light hair is covered by a sheer plus veil, similar to the one Jisung and Felix wear, but it is longer, falling to her waist that's not covered in a leather corset. Instead, she wears a shirt that hangs on one of her thin shoulders, the other around her bicep. It's short and it ends at the end of her rib cage, leaving a bit of skin showing until where a long blue skirt wraps around her hips, falling in pleated waves. Jisung notices Hyunjin's eyes flickering over her over and over again and he smiles.

Their tallest friend is wearing a darker blue, his shirt ending above his belly button that shows off his defined muscles. He wears pants low on his hips, the hems decorated with shining beads. Felix is dressed in a similar style, only in a soft green, a shawl over his shoulder and a veil to cover his blonde locks. Jisung wonders why he has one too if it's for Valkyrie and Felix's hair to be covered up.

"You all look nice," Jisung compliments them all with a smile. "How are you feeling Valkyrie?"

"Better. Although after such a hard hit my head still feels quite heavy," She answers with a soft laugh. Jisung notices when they step out how she tugs her veil to cover the left side of her face where her wound is. Hyunjin slips his hand into hers, squeezing it reassuringly.

Chan is by Felix's side in almost an instant, his orange set of clothing just like Hyunjin's compliments them against each other. "Oh, Innie, pink looks good on you!" Jisung gives him two thumbs up and he smiles widely, giving him a spin. His shirt has reflective beads hanging from the hem, both sleeves on his biceps instead of his shoulders.

Seungmin's deep green clothing is like Jeongin's, only a sheer piece of fabric falls from around his hips, over the silky fabric of his pants. Changbin in purple hugs him, his shirt bludging on his biceps, his pants just too long for him.

"Hi," Jisung skips over to Minho, who's wearing a fiery red set. His sleeves are around his biceps, leaving his shoulders and collarbones free to stare at. Jisung hopes that he's put that sun serum on that saved him back in Sunsen. His shirt is short, his abdomen on display that Jisung had stolen peeks at before. His gaze holds on his tanned muscles for a bit and Minho chuckles softly before reaching for his hand.

"Mother Barbada gave me directions," he says and Jisung hums. "At least someone knows where we are going then," Chan laughs and Hyunjin nods.

"How far is it?" Valkyrie questions, still tugging at her veil. "Far enough for a camel," Minho responds and she looks up at Hyunjin, her eyes shining. He smiles down at her, tugging her closer to his body. "Mother Barbada gave me some coins to rent a few camels for the trip,"

"Well, let's hop to it!" Jeongin cheers, running away in the direction of the stables. Jisung laughs at him and hurries after him, dragging Minho along with him.

Valkyrie stares up in awe at the camels. "What a strange creature," she murmurs as pats its soft nose. "So tall... how do we get on?" The stable boy pats its side and it sits, waiting for them to hop on.

“There you go, lady,” He smiles at her. “Have a safe journey,”

They rent four camels and sit with the same people they did on the ride in. Jeongin jams himself between Seungmin and Changbin, proud of himself that he’s broken up the couple for now. Jisung shakes his head at him.

“So,” Minho clears his throat before going off in a trot. “Keep up everyone! If we travel at a good speed we’ll be back in time for dinner when we’re on our way back!” With that bit of prompting, they’re all off, laughing and chatting as they gaze in awe at the beautiful streets.

It gets busier the deeper they go into the city and billboards flash with different adverts, sometimes with just pictures of the desert that Jisung gazes at with wonder.

The buildings part after around an hour of riding and in the near distance, a massive building with tall towers, wide domed roofs and glittering gold and precious gemstones gleam, the light beams shining off them, hurting his eyes. He almost has to squint, looking at the palace. The gates around it are the same as the gates on the entry points to the city, golden lotus and twirled metal.

It’s breathtaking. Jisung has never seen such a glamorous building in his life.

The camels halt suddenly, twenty paces from the gates. They lay down, asking them to get off. Minho slides off and Jisung watches how he stretches, his muscles tensing and his heart stutters in his chest which he frowns at as he slips off the camel.

“There’s a stable, there,” Jeongin points about five paces to the right. “They’ll let us keep them there until we need to go back, right?”

“I’m sure they would,” Felix agrees, taking the reins of his camel that stands, the others being lead by Jeongin and Hyunjin. Jisung turns away from Minho who’s now staring at him to find Valkyrie spinning around, gazing at everything.

“It’s really different from Scalva, isn’t it?” He smiles at her and she nods her head, still looking around. “I must say I was not aware such places existed...”

“Either did I,” he whispers to her. She smiles at him, her silver ring shining brightly in the clear sunlight. “Who has the letter?” Minho asks when the others taking the camels to the stables return. Chan raises his hand, the note in his fist.

The guards at the gate take the note, reading it quickly before letting them in. “There will be an advisor to take you to the royals. They will be waiting for you all,” one of the three tells them.

“Thank you,” Felix smiles at them. Their eyes linger on his pale hair and stare at Valkyrie when she passes. She clutches onto Hyunjin’s hand tighter.

Jisung finds it rather intimidating to be walking up to the threshold of such a beautiful palace. He reaches out for a hand to grasp and Minho tugs him closer to his body as they walk up the three flights of stairs to the doors with more guards. Chan shows them the paper and they’re let in, the advisor waiting there for them.

“Good morning,” the man bows to them before gesturing for them to come in. “Our royals have been waiting for you to come. You had the whole city curious about your landing,”

“It surprised us, too,” Jeongin grits out. The advisor purses his lips but forces a smile. “This way,” he leads them up a set of stairs, decorated with gold and sapphires. Jisung is scared to even breathe in the palace.

Rows of paintings of previous rulers line the halls that they walk briskly down. They’re all dressed beautifully, jewellery adored heavily on all of them. When they reach a pair of polished wooden doors, Jisung gazes at the last portrait, two women and an infant in the taller woman’s arms. His lips pull into a smile, reminded of the two women in Mydar that treat him like their own son.

The doors clunk open, slowly, probably for dramatic effect Jisung supposes. It works, too.

“Do not be scared. The royals are all nice women. They will not bite.”

They all don't say anything and follow him in quietly.

In the back of the room, three women sit on a red and golden carpet, potted plants filling the space and many paintings covering the sandstone walls. Water drips down the walls in front of them like waterfalls, filling the room with a soft trickling sound.

“Your Majesties, the guests have arrived,” he bows and goes off to the side, leaving them in the middle of the room. Jisung clutches Minho's hand tighter.

“Welcome,” one woman stands, Jisung recognises her as the taller lady in the painting, although she has aged a few years. Red jewels hang from her earlobes, a large golden hoop in her nostril connecting to her veil hanging loosely around her head.

“We were very intrigued about your landing, we wished to meet the people that made such a fuss,” a younger woman in green and blue hues speaks. Jisung doesn't recognise her from the painting but he makes the connection to the baby in the painting. She looks around Valkyrie and Jeongin's age.

“That would be us,” Chan speaks up. “We are not sure what happened ourselves... but here we are one way or another,”

The woman at the back narrows her eyes at them. Her golden clothing pools around her, but she doesn't stand even when she begins to speak. The woman in red sits by her side.

“You intended on coming here?” Her green eyes are piercing and Jisung nods gently. “Well... we didn't know this place existed until we crashed, but we've been on the lookout for settlements,” he explains softly. The young woman in cool tones stands, wandering closer to them. Her hoop is much smaller than the woman in red. “For what?”

“We came to warn people,” Minho speaks up and they nod. “Of what

would we need to be warned about?" The young woman hisses. The woman in red pulls her back, hissing under her breath.

Chan tells them of the Capital. Of Mydar and their ship, of the other settlements.

They stare at them. "And why should we help you? You crashed into our dunes and do not bring any proof but your word? The City of Sivra has only survived so long because of our careful decisions that we royals have made. But we only make them if the evidence is present. That, you do not have."

Minho had tried over the five days to fix their device that allows them to call Isa and Fern, but the signal to channel Mydar or other stations they gave to other settlements wouldn't connect. The only thing he could get into was Mother Barbada's radio and the small screen sitting on her desk.

"We wouldn't lie about such things," Jisung grits out. "You have our word. If you won't ally with us, at least get your army ready. It will be nowhere near the size of what you'll be fighting against,"

"They won't dare to even step foot in our city," The woman in gold speaks. "We have had our fair share of wars before. Our allies did not just use to be friendly all the time,"

They frown. "Allies?" Jisung questions. "You mean you have allies on this continent?" The lady in red nods. "All the different cities and kingdoms. We are the biggest of the five,"

They share looks between each other.

The woman in gold finally stands. "We cannot help. I do not see any proof of this all," she declares and anger bubbles up inside Jisung. He could tell them nothing to change their minds now.

"Then," he croaks out. "At least help us fix our ship to go back home?" His eyes are pleading and the woman in red opens her mouth, but she stops once the smaller woman laughs gently.

The golden lady laughs. "We do not help outlanders that claim war upon us. You are dismissed. Get home yourselves,"



Jisung trudges through the streets after the camels are safe in the stables near Mother Barbada's residence. Minho chases after him, trying to catch him, dodging people still shopping at stalls and returning to their homes.

Jisung storms through the streets, the setting sun turning the world around him golden, but he doesn't pay any mind to the beauty. He runs, his calves burning as he pushes harder.

"Jisung!" Minho calls out to him. Jisung just wants to cry, scream out and claw at those women who refused to even help them get back home.

He won't see his daughter again.

The thought makes him stop in his tracks, his feet throbbing. He slowly turns back to face Minho running after him. The sunlight shines into his eyes, turning them into orbs of amber.

He wants to scream out to him, that he'll go back and make them change their minds, no matter what it took. But he is not stupid enough for that. He knows it won't work. The three women are set in their ways, unapologetic.

Minho pulls him into a hug and he cries, hot tears bubbling down his face. "That's not fair!" He wails, his fists pulling on the fabric of Minho's red shirt. Minho hugs him tighter, his hands rubbing at his back.

He pulls away from the hug and Minho takes his face in both of his hands, gently cradling his cheeks. "I promise I will get us back," he whispers. He gazes into his eyes, illuminated by the sunlight.

He burns in his hands, hot like a flame and Minho's stomach warms at how ethereal he can look even now. But in the sun, he glows so

brightly, nourishing that flame that he is.

He is the moth, drawn to bright light, burning flames. Jisung is that raging fire, a hot furnace that scolds one man, but soothes another.

Jisung's tears stop falling and he stares into his eyes before his gaze falls to his parted lips as he heaves in deep breathes. "I will not let us stay here. I will fix that ship, even if I have to dig it out with my bare hands. I will get you back to Eunbyul,"

Jisung's lips lift, a smile to show gratitude. Minho's breath fails him.

His heart is beating wildly in his chest and slowly, one hand falls to Jisung's waist, the other still cupping his cheek, his thumb tugging on his bottom lip gently.

Minho's mother once scolded him for getting too close to an open flame. He wonders what she'd say now, seeing him cradling it like it is the most precious thing the universe has ever created.

He leans closer, wishing to kiss that flame, feel the heat on his lips. Jisung's eyes flutter shut, his body pressing against his own.

The younger head falls to his shoulder and Minho shuts his eyes. He holds him close, killing his own flame of desire that had almost burnt right through his wall of control.

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Notes for the Chapter:

Minho I'm so sorry man... hes been pining for so long omg ANYways!! I hope you guys aren't getting bored with bigger chapters :0000

On another note i am so upset and stressed atm its not funny at alllll but writing this makes me forget about all my worries and I'm just so excited for the full story while I'm writing AHH i just hope that everyone is still enjoying and liking the way this fic is going!

Thank you for comments too!! Support helps so much and i feel so loved by all the nice things u guys say 🤖 if u have any questions or if anyone wants to talk i check my twitter quote frequently!!

Love u all!! Until next week! <3
[my twt!](#)

Mother Barbada throws her spoon across the room when she hears the news of the royals rejecting to even help them fix their ship.

“That is disgraceful!” She yells, a deep frown knitting between her eyebrows. “What will you all do now? We do not have engineers that know your ship to fix it, nor could we even ask them without the royals help!”

“Mother Barbada, I know that ship inside and out. If we can get it out and to a safer place where I can work on it, I’ll be able to fix it,” her eyes narrow at him. “Are you sure you can?” He hesitates for a few moments before he nods his head. “I can.” He replies. “Okay,” she nods her head a few times.

“Now come eat, children of mine. Rest well and eat well while you remain in my home,” her eyes hold a certain sadness to them that reflect in their own eyes.

Chan pats Minho on the back, his lips pursed as he gazes at his best friend. “How would you get different parts that you might need?”

Minho stares at him. “We’ll work that out once I assess the damage.”

As they eat, Mother Barbada stares at them all from the head of the table. “Children,” she says and they all turn to look at her, spoons clunking as they hit the table softly. “You should visit the town and find jobs tomorrow. You will need money to fix your ship. I can give you starting funds, but it will be suspicious if I give you too much,”

“Thank you,” Felix smiles at her. “We all owe you,”

“Nonsense,” she waves her hand at them. “I do not need anything in return. I am an old woman, lonely without you filling my home that once was full long ago. Your company is enough for me,” she smiles, soft, genuine and then gets up, disappearing into her room.

The table is quiet for the rest of the night, none of them knowing how to lighten the sombre mood that has surrounded them since they

left the palace earlier today.

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Jobs are rather easy to find. The stall owners along the streets are eager for help, the restaurant owners accept help for cleaning tables and waiters quickly, happy for the extra hands in the busier parts of town.

Jisung doesn't have experience in working in a restaurant, he had originally tried to ask if the stables needed help, but they said they didn't need anymore people to pay. Minho works with him in the restaurant, serving countless plates of food to different people while Jisung scrubs pots and pans clean almost all day.

Days fly like that, leaving in the mornings to the smell of strong spices that makes his mouth water, and coming home in the evening, starving and tired. Three weeks pass by like that.

Jisung gets more frustrated and worried about the lack of correspondence and worry eats him throughout his day. He knows Fern and Isa are just as worried, probably thinking the worst by not being able to contact them. Jisung hates that too. That the two women with golden hearts are potentially mourning the nine of them. He wants to scream across the globe that they're okay and they will be back soon, but his voice can only be carried so far.

"What about the time our boat capsized?" Hyunjin brings up and Valkyrie's eyes go wide. They chuckle a bit and Jisung groans loudly. "I almost drowned!" He cries out and Jeongin snorts at him.

They've been sitting for almost an hour after dinner going over memories they've made together, letting Valkyrie in on the moments they all shared before.

"You know, Jisung hated Hyunjin's guts in the first few months," she cocks an eyebrow at that, probably surprised since they all seem so close. "My father was the head doctor in the institution, probably still

is,” Hyunjin mutters. “I got brought in as a doctor,”

“It’s all sorted now,” Jisung smiles at his friend. Hyunjin smiles back at him, genuine and happy.

Jisung recalls the moments he had with Hyunjin, close and intimate but underlined with selfishness and lust. They were younger, out in the wild their futures not guaranteed so Jisung doesn’t harbour any bad feeling about it but he wishes he hadn’t been so easily swooned by kisses. He’s more than glad that Hyunjin has found someone to love who loves him back. It warms his heart to see them both together.

“Well,” Valkyrie stands from the table first, stretching her arms over her head. “It’s getting late. I’m going to get ready for bed,” her eyes linger on Hyunjin and she takes his hand gently, making him rise and follow her like a lost puppy. “Goodnight!”

“Those two are in love,” Felix sings and laughs. “I’m glad,” Jisung murmurs with a fond smile. Changbin and Felix smile at him knowingly.

“It is getting late, though,” Minho comments. “We should all go to bed. Our days are all busy now,” They all murmur in agreement and say their goodnights to each other. Felix squeezes Jisung especially tight. “I know you’re fretting,” he whispers to him. “I can see it. Try not to worry so much, I’m sure Fern and Isa aren’t thinking we’re all dead,”

Jisung only forces a smile for his friend. “I’ll try my best not to,” it has kept him awake for nights on end, his stomach swirling with anxiety. There’s not much he can do about but he’s tried his best to contain it, to not show it but Felix has always been able to see right through him.

As he walks to the door to his room, he spots Mother Barbada slipping out and he frowns at her as they make eye contact. She smiles at him. “I was putting your veil back after washing it,” she explains and Jisung pauses and stares at her. “Mother Barbada,” he starts at the elderly woman cocks her head at him, waiting. “Why did you only give three of us veils...?”

Her lips turn up at the corners and she pats his arm fondly. "To protect that divine energy I feel from the three of you. It is a tradition in the City of Sivra to shield that energy, to protect it," she tells him with fondness in her voice. "It is more common among women. You three have differences... from the others. You, my boy, are fierce like the hottest fires in the forge, but you were not always that way. Things have made you stronger, and maybe your energy shifted into after your daughters birth? You are powerful, my boy. Your friends too, that girl is a force to come across. Like cocoa beans," she muses gently. "Bitter if it is eaten before you have put the work into it, but once you do it is sweet." Jisung smiles fondly at her words.

"And Felix?" Her smile widens. "You know your friend well enough. That boy is a ray of sunshine! Such purity we need in our lives," Jisung can't fit his grin. His friend has always been optimistic, looking forward to the future and always looking out for everyone, trying to make them smile if they're feeling down. "Valkyrie's energy came with womanhood... and perhaps your past as something to do with why you can Felix have such energy?"

Jisung wonders why Seungmin hadn't received a veil either. He went through the same process. "But Seungmin?" He ends up saying and Mother Barbada hums, tugging on her own veil. "I don't think he is quite like the both of you. Felix has said he wishes to have a child one day... and you have already done so but Seungmin... maybe he didn't let it change him like it changed you two?" Jisung blinks and now that he thinks about it, Seungmin hasn't really been interested in anything to do with the fact they can bear children now. He didn't interact with Eunbyul a lot either, but he was always tender with her whenever he would play with her.

Seungmin's always been a little bit like that, flexible in an odd way. He knows who he is, something rare to find in someone so young but he is unapologetic about that. Jisung smiles at the thought of him, strong-willed and witty.

He gives Mother Barbada one last smile before he bids her goodnight.

He tosses and turns like he usually does but he falls asleep quicker than he typically does. Sharing fond memories together and Mother

Barbada's words have eased his mind. He hopes for more nights like these—even ten years from now.

Minho shakes him awake before the sun has risen in the sky. He groans, rolling over, bumping into his leg. He drowsily wakes up, frowning at him.

"What?" He grits out and he sees how Minho flinches slightly before rubbing his arm gently. "I know it's early and you're going to think I'm crazy—"

"What's new?" Jisung sighs, but he purses his lips at him. "What do you have planned now?"

"Well," Minho takes a deep breath in. "We're going to find the ship,"

Jisung narrows his eyes at him. "What? Why now? We don't have enough money to hire any help,"

"I know that," Minho gets off of his bed, throwing him a bag. "Get dressed though. I figured out something and I was working on something after our shift ended over the past three weeks," he tells him. Jisung quickly dresses after Minho turns around.

"And what exactly have you figured out?" He pulls on the pants that he wore on the way into the city almost a month ago. "A tracking device," he answers. "If I can get it in the ship, I think I know how to fix our signal issues." Jisung walks in front of him, frowning. "How?"

Minho gazes over at him before pulling out something from his bag that Jisung hasn't seen before. He presses a button on its hilt, and the part that looks like a blade lights up with a zap of electricity. "I made it," he answers back and Jisung stares at him in awe before chuckling. "It was pretty easy, now we need to get going,"

"What about the others?" Jisung hisses at him as Minho grabs his wrist and begins to pull him out of their room. "We can't all leave. If we're reported those royal ladies might do something to us. Besides we don't all need to go for this and we still need people to work so

we can get the ship fixed sooner rather than later,”

“Can you fix the caller?” Jisung questions, following him out. He slings a bag over his shoulder, hearing water splash around in bottles when he moves. “Once the signal is alive I should be able to call in,” Jisung heaves out a sigh of relief. “And then we can call for backup and get help from the royals?”

“We can only try,” Minho replies. “We’ll only take one camel, it’s easier that way,” Jisung says as they creep out of Mother Barbada’s. Jisung is kind of expecting for her to jump out of the shadows, her spoon in her hand and a frown on her face but they get out without any distractions. The air is cool when they step out and Jisung shuffles closer to Minho for extra warmth. “There’s a jacket in my bag, get it out to wear,” Minho whispers as they near the stables.

He quickly takes off the bag, laying it on the ground before shrugging it on, instantly a little warmer.

There’s only one light on outside the stables, one boy sitting reading a book on the ground covered in loose hay. He peeks up at them with a frown. “A camel at this time of the night isn’t unheard of,” he comments as he takes the money from Minho’s palm. “But outlanders...” Minho drops extra money in his hand and the boy zips his mouth shut, gesturing to the camel waiting for them.

Jisung gets on first, holding the reigns in tight fists. Minho’s hands grip hard at his hips as the camel stands. “How are we supposed to get out? The gates either have facial recognition or something else?” Jisung speaks a little panicked as they near the golden gates.

“Mother Barbada,” Minho tells him with a fond laugh. He reaches for a number pad and enters a code and the gates open quickly. “You told her?” Jisung is surprised that she wasn’t out wishing them a safe journey.

“She was the safest bet,” Minho shrugs gently. “And she cares for us a lot, I knew she wouldn’t mind helping us,”

“Yeah... But how are we supposed to know where to go to find our ship?”

Minho's quiet for a bit. "That part is pure luck," he whispers and Jisung whips around to glare at him. "What happens if we get lost?" He hisses at him and Minho flinches back from him, grimacing. "We won't," he replies confidently. Jisung purses his lips and turns back. "I vaguely remember the way, although we can't read the landscape because sand dunes shift... they're never the same."

"What happens if it is buried in the sand and we miss it and we keep going?"

"I don't know," Minho mutters and Jisung groans out, hanging his head low. "We just have to hope we don't do that,"

"For someone who I thought was a pessimist this whole time you're being oddly optimistic," Jisung grits out and Minho laughs gently, his hands slowly brushing up to his waist where they settle, his thumbs rubbing circles on his lower back. "I promised I'd get you back to Eunbyul. That's worth being optimistic about," Jisung tenses the slightest bit. Minho feels his muscles tighten underneath his hands and the pause in the air makes him smile a little bit. Jisung stares ahead at the rolling sand dunes, his heart pumping blood through his body louder than he recalled it to.

The sky changes before their eyes and they mutter in awe when the sun begins the peek out behind the sand in the far distance. The sky changes to hues of orange and pinks, soft lavenders and Jisung stares in wonder as the golden orb rises higher and higher.

"I've never seen such a clear sunrise before," Minho utters, his chin resting on Jisung's shoulder. The younger peers at his face and quickly looks ahead once more when his cheeks grow hot. He shifts a bit and he hears Minho gasp. "Look over there!" He points his finger in the far distance where something white is gleaming in the rising sunlight.

"That's it!" Minho cheers. "Come on!" Jisung laughs shocked that their luck has finally appeared. "It doesn't look like it's buried either,"

The sun is high in the sky by the time they've arrived. Jisung notices that the doors to the ship aren't impossibly high, but only a few

meters higher than his head. The rope is still there, much more sturdy now that it's buried beneath the sand than it was when it was dangling freely.

“Come on,” Minho jumps off the camel, not even waiting for it to lay for them to get off easier. Jisung waits though and ties its reigns to the rope.

He climbs up with a small struggle and he accepts Minho's hand to pull him up once he's close enough. There's sand in the ship and Jisung falls straight onto a small dune as soon as he gets in. He brushes himself off while Minho helps him back to his feet with a soft laugh. “Do you have the torch?” Minho asks him and Jisung nods, pulling it out of the big compartment of the bag he wears. He flicks it on and follows Minho in, lighting up the darkness so the elder can see what he needs to look for. And so he doesn't fall on his ass again.

“So what exactly do you need to do for this to work?” Jisung questions as they enter the control room. “Well,” Minho murmurs as he flicks a few things on the control panel before wandering over to the wall next to Jisung. He peers at him as he forces a metal door open. It screeches loudly and they both wince at the horrid noise that echoes around the ship.

“All the power is connected from here,” he shows him all the switches and Jisung doesn't know how he has been able to memorise what every single switch and button does. He flicks the biggest one at the bottom and cranks it up again. “This is the main switch. It's completely out... which isn't great but that's where this thing comes in handy,” he pulls out his invention and shoves it into the panel before switching it on.

To Jisung's complete amazement, the lights flicker for a few seconds before staying on.

“Minho! You did it!” He tackles him, wrapping his arms around his shoulders, toes dragging on the floor beneath him. Minho grips his waist and spins around, laughing. Jisung laughs loudly, his hands gripping at his shoulders, head tipped back with laughter. Minho's heart makes its usual fluttering sensation in his chest. He puts him down carefully, his mouth feeling like it's going to spilt with how

wide he's been smiling.

"I can try to get the signal now," he clears his throat and his heart picks up once more when he sees Jisung's red cheeks. Jisung digs through the bags and hands him the caller along with his pouch of tools that he was given back in Mydar. He hadn't needed to use them until now and Jisung had forgotten that he even had them. Minho thanks him and wanders over to the control panel. Jisung finds the torch abandoned on the control panel and flicks it off, not needing it any longer.

Dried blood is smeared over the middle of the board and Jisung grimaces. "I found Valkyrie up there," he murmurs. "It's a good thing she wasn't too badly hurt," Minho tears his eyes away from the stain to look at the navigator that is flickering softly. "It isn't even picking up on Sivra's signals... we must've landed further away than we thought."

"It must seem closer because it's a desert and we can just travel pretty much in a straight line," Jisung concludes and Minho hums along with him. "Makes sense. Now, there's a small pouch that Mother Barbada gave me— it's pretty eye-catching— can you get me it? It has the tracker I made."

Jisung digs in the bag he gestured to with his head and finds the decorated red pouch straight away. It shines in the artificial lights and Jisung snorts at it before tossing it to Minho who's leaning over the navigation system. "I don't think I can get this working just yet... but I think I can still get a signal at least..."

He fiddles with a few things, hissing in pain when he gets zapped a few times.

Just as he goes to connect the tracker he made to wires the power cuts out, going off with a soft buzzing sound. Minho turns, his eyes taking a while to adjust to the sudden darkness. "Minho?" Jisung weakly calls out. His voice is weak, something that sets Minho to worry.

"Hey, hey, I'll try again. Here, where are you?" He blinks and when he makes out a faint silhouette he grips his hand, squeezing it hard.

Jisung flicks the torch back on, his features outlined by the yellow tinted light. His brows are furrowed and Minho knows that look—when he feels defeated. It isn't often, but he had seen the same look on his face too much lately. In the palace when the royals refused to help when they were helping in the restaurant and in the nights when he tosses and turns, unable to sleep.

Minho's been worrying about him ever since he's seen that look. Jisung is strong, undoubtedly but even Minho feels so deflated and hopeless. Everyone does, he knows it but Jisung is still working around all these emotions. As much as Minho knows he is capable to take care of himself, Minho wants to nurture his flame, tend to the emotions that try to blow him out.

He tries to turn the electric current on again but it doesn't work. Jisung watches, still for a few moments as Minho looks over everything. "Ah... the wire busted," he mutters quietly. He hears Jisung suck in a deep breath and he looks up just to see him dropping the torch behind him as he runs.

"Jisung!" He calls after him, taking the torch with him. "Where are you going?" He hopes he remembers the layout of the ship, even in the dark because getting injured back out here would be a hassle. He hears a bang and a pained cry and he rushes out to find Jisung at the exit, clutching his leg. The doors where they had pried them open have a sharp jagged line of metal and Minho watches, his jaw slack as Jisung rips his leg back from where it had gotten caught.

His mind travels back to wandering around the wilderness after breaking them out and the blackberry bush incident. He rushes to retrieve the first aid kit from one of the bags before kneeling next to the younger who's now sobbing, covering his face with a bloodied hand.

"Sung..." Minho whispers out gently. "I'm sorry," he looks down at his leg and purses his lips. It's pretty thick, but it's not in a place that will hurt when he walks. Jisung shakes his head, pulling his hands away from his face.

"I'm just so tired," he whimpers out. Minho wants to cradle his face and kiss the tears away that spill down his cheeks. He wants to

soothe out his pain, but he knows he's burning out, reaching a point he hasn't really felt much before. "I know," he moves closer to him, opening the first aid kit.

Jisung sighs out pretty heavily before his face contorts into something like anger. His brows contort and he cries out. Minho doesn't say anything, just lets him go. He has his moments too and he knows how good it feels to just scream sometimes.

"I'm so tired of fighting when nothing goes right," Jisung grits out. "There's nothing I can do right now, but I still feel like I'm just drowning!"

Jisung grabs a bandage from the kit and begins to wrap it around his leg. He'd go back to Hyunjin once they got back, but it would have to do for now.

Minho can see how much he's struggling and he feels stupid and guilty that he had dragged him out of bed this morning for him to help him. He didn't mean to cause him so much distress. He gulps and licks his lips.

"Then why?" He asks gently and Jisung sniffs, wiping his tears away with his sleeve. "Why what?" Jisung questions.

"Why are you even doing this if you're suffering so much?"

"Because I care about tomorrow," he mutters, lifting his head. His youthful face has been mauled away by the rampaging plague of tiredness and his eyes are dull and dimming. "I'm fighting because I believe we deserve a tomorrow." He tightens the bandage making him wince a little bit. "Because I want to see tomorrow, I want to see overmorrow and the days that follow, the months, the years," He breathes deep. "Because I refuse for this to be the end,"

Minho stares at him for a few seconds before nodding. "I said I'd get us out," he reminds. "And you know me. I'm not going to give up. We will get home. This is not the end, it is far from it," he stands and offers Jisung a hand. "And when I get you home, then you can do whatever you wish to get your overmorrow," Jisung takes his hand and Minho hauls him to his feet once more. "And I'll be there every

step of the way,” Jisung blinks at him, his lips parting softly. “That,” Minho mutters. “Is a promise,”

“I’ll hold you do it,” Jisung mutters back.

Minho fixes the broken wire on his electric contraption and shoves it back in. The power comes back on and Jisung sighs heavily in relief.

“Now, I just had it so this will be quick,” Minho tells him as he wanders over to fiddle with the navigator again.

He pulls back after a few minutes, taking the caller. Jisung trudges over to him, peering over his shoulder to see if it is connecting.

The screen flashes, connecting and Jisung feels like he can’t breathe. It dings once, twice, thrice and on its fourth ding the screen flashes once more Isa’s face popping up.

Jisung lets out a strangled breath and when his sobs start, Isa breaks down on the screen, her brows lifting and tears running down her cheeks.

“You’re alive!” She cries out and Jisung nods his head. Yes, they’re alive, yes they’ve finally made contact with them once more. “Fern!” She shouts. “Oh, Fern!” When the taller woman bends to look at the screen Jisung cries harder when she bursts into tears, embracing her wife tightly. “We had thought the worst when we could get any signals,” Isa sobs out.

“Did you pick up our location yet?” Minho asks gently, not wanting to break off the moment they’re having but if he knows that has worked, help will be on its way.

Isa nods her head frantically. “It came back a few minutes ago. We were alerted right away and we could only hope it was you trying to contact us,” Minho sighs out in relief and Jisung slumps against him, his tears reduced to sniffles now. “What ever has happened to you?” Fern tries her best to compose herself, but Minho sees how her lip wobbles when she stops talking.

"We crashed," Jisung tells them and their eyes widen dramatically. "What!?" Isa hisses out. "Are you all okay? Please tell me no one is badly hurt... no one is..."

"We're all okay," Minhó rushes out after he sees the woman's panic. "Most of us sustained injuries from the crash, but everyone is well. And alive," He adds and he sees how both women relax.

"But how did you crash... the check-in on the ship it had not long ago claimed there was nothing wrong with it?" Minhó's brows furrow. "That's the problem... I have no idea what made it occur. The lights started to flicker and then we were going down," Fern's lips purse.

"You can't find faults anywhere?" She asks and he rubs the back of his neck sheepishly. "Well... that's the thing. We landed in the desert. In a sand dune and there is no way we can get it out without help. I haven't been able to check the fuel tank or the connecting wires to the generator..."

Isa frowns. "And no one will help you? My god, just where have you landed?"

"The City of Sivra," Jisung informs them. "It is a grand place, ruled by three women. Two queens and their daughter I presume... we told them about the war, hoping we'd gain them as an ally but they have refused. We couldn't prove it either... none of our callers worked and the documents on them wouldn't load. They have electricity here, but our signal was in the ship that is pretty much... shitty,"

Both the women look mad. "We must send reinforcements, then," Isa concludes. "We have your coordinates that's settled. But, if there things you need?"

"Another mechanic," Minhó asks gently. "There's no way I can fix any issue on a ship this big by myself in a limited time frame."

"Done, we can see who is willing to go and we'll send them all if there's more than one willing to go," Fern nods her head. "We might need back up to convince the royals at a later date. If we call can you promise to answer?" Jisung looks back and forth between the two women that consider themselves his mothers. Fern nods and smiles

gently. “Isa has only been sleeping right next to the caller ever since we lost the signal,” His heart warms, but he feels a pang of hurt and guilt. He didn’t want to put them through such torment, but there was nothing he could do.

They talk for a while after but they have to end it when Fern begins falling asleep on Isa. They had forgotten about time zones and their signal had reconnected around midnight in Mydar.

Minho turns to look at Jisung who is smiling softly. He’s glad that gave him the closure he needed and that it seemed to make him brighter. “We should head back now,” Minho murmurs gently. Jisung hesitates.

He knows that the signal can only go so far and that with the ship so far away from the city, calling them is not an option.

Minho takes his hand and stands. “Okay,” Jisung breathes out slowly. “I guess we should tell the others the good news?”

→

Hyunjin drops his empty bowl on the ground when they tell them the news. Jeongin screams with Changbin and Seungmin and Felix stare at each other while Valkyrie and Chan look mildly concerned at their friends.

“Help is on the way, too. We should be able to get the ship out with the backup ships,” Minho informs them and Felix’s jaw drops.

“They’re sending more than one ship...” he mutters and Jisung laughs at him. “Three actually.” Fern had gone and asked for volunteers and the people of Mydar were much more eager to help them than they all thought. Mechanics, nurses, guards and regular citizens had signed up to come help them out of their tricky situation. Three ships meant more help than towing it out of the sand, although Minho already suspects that won’t be quite enough.

"I was wondering where you two had gone off to," Valkyrie peers at them with her icy eyes and Minhø shuffles around while looking anywhere but her. She reads him like a book— the only person able to see through all his difficult and protective barriers. She had confronted him the night after the situation in the palace, saying she'd seen them in the streets and how she saw his hesitation then his confidence only for it to shatter.

Valkyrie scares him a bit, truly.

"Well... We didn't want to wake up the whole city. Besides we got it done quick enough, right? It's not like anyone else knows what wires do," Minhø defends and Changbin rolls his eyes at him. Minhø has hit him too many times to count, but he always wants to slap him more.

Jisung sighs and leans against the wall. "It's a long trip back and forth, it is easier if we don't all go,"

"Oh my, of course, it is!" Mother Barbada interrupts Jisung. "Now all of you! Of to bed!! It has been a long day for all of us!" She ushers them all into their rooms, chasing Jisung up the stairs with a broom in her hands. Jisung slams the door behind him, chest heaving before he and Minhø break out into fits of laughter.

"There's never a dull moment," Jisung comments with a sigh.

He's right and Minhø watches him fondly. They had both showered as soon as they got back, sweaty and sandy and stinking like camel. Jisung hops up onto his bed, gazing out of the window. He pats the space next to him for Minhø to come sit. The elder joins him and Jisung sighs as he looks up at the stars.

"Isn't it weird that no matter what part of the world we are in we still stare up at the same sky?" He whispers gently. He locks eyes with Minhø and he smiles. "I'm staring at the stars here... and Eunbyul could be looking at the same ones from Mydar..."

"I miss her, too," Minhø whispers. Jisung stares at him and sits on his bed instead of kneeling at the edge of the window next to his mattress. Minhø stares back, unsure what's going through Jisung's

head at this moment.

“Do you like me?” He ends up asking and Minho’s heart skids in his chest, echoing like rocks skimming over the surface of a quiet lake.

“Of course,” he smiles, trying to play it cool. Jisung cocks his head at him. “I mean, I just feel like I haven’t done enough to repay what you’ve done for me,” Jisung says so quietly he can barely hear the words moulding off his tongue. Minho’s heart refuses to calm in his chest. He fears it’s going to race right out of his rib cage sooner than later.

“So, thank you,” Jisung smiles at him. “I never thanked you for it... but I wanted you to know that I’m grateful for everything you’ve done,”

And if Minho wasn’t in love with him before, he is now drowning in the bottomless pit that is his affection for the man in front of him.

“You do a lot for me... and I know you like me... of course otherwise you wouldn’t do so much for me, but I just,” his own cheeks flush.

Jisung isn’t sure what he’s trying to say. He’s scared to tell him his feelings, the ones that he’s been thinking about lately.

Does he feel romantic love for Minho or is it a similar type of selfish need he felt with Hyunjin? Jisung fears finding the truth.

Minho gazes into his eyes and Jisung falter, ripping his eyes away from him. “Thank you for everything,” he whispers before tucking himself into his bed. Minho lingers at the end of his bed for a little bit before he slides in next to him. Jisung’s cheeks heat up, his heart thumping loudly.

“I’d do it all over again,” Minho whispers to him once he’s settled behind him.

“Just for you,”

→

Notes for the Chapter:

And here we are!! The chapter that finally has the blurb in it :PPPP

Minho.... u are so swoon worthy wtfff and i know the slow burn is getting increasingly annoying especially after last chapter but hang on... just a little longer....

Also the map!!! So i posted it on my twitter last week but i know some of u don't have twitter etc so i put it in so everyone can see it!!

Ive been pretty busy painting atm so I'm so sorry if I don't reply to comment quickly but ill do my best!! Have a great week everyone! <33333

The backup comes four days later. The sudden beeping of a connecting signal on the caller alerts Minhø and Jisung four days later while they're working in the restaurant.

They look at each other before running out, not even telling their boss what they're up to. They find the others quickly and within twenty minutes, they're out of the gates, Minhø rushing to connect a call to them. They don't bring camels but run on foot in the desert. Jisung learns now just how difficult it is to run on sand.

Three faces pop up on the screen and they huddle around Minhø, trying to gather what's going on.

"We got a signal," Minhø pants out to them. The man holding the caller, a mechanic Minhø worked with previously in Mydar smiles. "We can see the city in the distance," A woman tells them and then she looks away, squinting. "And you guys!"

"Good!" Changbin gives them a thumbs up. "You should pick us up and we should talk in the ship. It'll be safer that way," Chan tells them and they nod. A few moments later, sand sprays them in their faces, stinging their skin as a ship hovers over the sand ten meters ahead before landing, the doors opening vertically.

They rush in, not wanting to cause a scene again. It was probably sketchy that the nine of them had run out of the city in a rush, and all the citizens of the City of Sivra knew exactly who they are. One look at them all and they're pinpointed as the outlanders with the crashed ship.

"Should we connect with Lady Fern?" The woman asks and Felix's smile stretches wide when he realises who it is. "Kaya!" He cheers out, bounding towards her and wrapping her up in a hug. The nurse laughs, hugging the younger male back just as tight. "I didn't recognise you on the call! You've cut your hair!" Her hair that once fell to her collarbone is now gone and instead is clipped back to a neat pixie cut. "It suits you," he finishes and she thanks him with another smile.

“But yes!” Felix takes a step away from her. “We should call Fern,” Jisung pokes his head over Minhø’s shoulder, having issues trying to see past him and Hyunjin in front of him. Valkyrie and Changbin are in front of both of them and have no issues seeing as the other shorter ones in their group.

Fern answers the call quickly, Isa bounding towards her in the background before she pops herself down on her wife’s lap, beaming at them all.

“You’ve made it!” She cheers and they all erupt into cheers themselves. Fern laughs at all of them. “With no hiccups, either. You all did a fine job. Now, since you are all here, we must discuss the plan,” she clears her throat and they all stop their cheering to focus on her.

“Are you close to the ship?” She asks first and Minhø turns to the navigator plastered on the wall of the control panel. It’s an upgrade for sure and Jisung sees how he stares at it with delight. He points to the flickering dot a bit further up and then to the bright yellow orb. “We can fly there in no time,” He concludes. “But I don’t think we have enough force to get it out... even with these three ships,”

Although there are three ships, it doesn’t make up the mass of their much bigger ship by quite a lot. It would take at least another two ships for their ship to even budge, but with the tons of sand around it, Minhø knows there’s no chance without something else helping. But the help that is around is limited.

Minhø’s eyes go bright in realisation. “The merchants...” He whispers and Jisung nods his head. They’d come in close contact with merchants offering goods to the restaurants. They came in big metal trucks that looked like they each weighed a ton each. Minhø’s seen six of these merchants around in the past week.

“That’s it!” Jisung nods his head. “How much funds do we have if we put it together?” He asks quickly and Chan blinks at him. “A lot...? I don’t know the exact number but if you want to hire help I think we might just have enough,”

“That works for me,” Minhø grins broadly. “Pass it over, I’ll win it in

a heartbeat,” Chan stares at his friend and when Jisung looks around the room he sees Hyunjin and Changbin grimacing at him, too.

“What?” Minho shrugs his shoulders. “What do you have against my haggling?”

“Maybe the one time you came home with three piglets instead of the tractor motor your father sent you to trade for...?” Changbin mentions and Chan’s lips lift. “Or the time you traded the winter’s firewood for a new broken tv...”

“I’ll have you remember how cute these piglets were and I fixed that tv and sold it for thrice as much as the winter woodpile was worth!”

“A little backwards, but it’ll do,” Seungmin sighs and Jisung can’t help but sigh with him.

Valkyrie frowns, however, and takes a few steps ahead of them. “I’m going,” She declares and Hyunjin grins at her this time. Minho glares at her but she turns as if she could feel it and gives him a piercing glare that Minho grits his teeth at. “I’m a pretty lady, I’m sure that’ll be much more efficient than you trying to haggle with... piglets,” Minho rolls his eyes and Isa’s laughter cackles through the speakers.

“Or they’ll simply pity me,” She whispers, her eyes gazing down at her shoes then. Hyunjin reaches out and grabs her hand. “I’ll take a caller in case I need backup. Someone should wait at the gates, in case too,” Hyunjin goes to volunteer himself but Chan steps up instead. “I can fight... pretty well,”

Valkyrie nods at him. “I haven’t had the chance to see your true potential,” she muses and Jisung realises they haven’t needed to fight that much just yet. He hopes it stays that way.

“Well, that’s settled. Now hurry and get them. We should get this ship out once and for all,” Minho rolls his shoulders, getting his muscles loose.

Valkyrie has had her fair share of questionable moments in her life. Once she had been with her father's hunting group and spotted a large elk in a freezing river current. She had jumped in without a second thought, almost froze in the river if it wasn't for her father. She had gotten the kill and fed the whole village that night but she ended up in bed for the next five days.

Another time she was picking wild berries with her grandmother when one of the snow lions wandered down the mountain track into their valley. As children of Scalva, they are all taught to back away slowly from such a beast before running once far enough away. Valkyrie stared at it straight in the face, got out her bow and arrow and shot it through the eyes, then continued on picking berries while her grandmother was heaving with panic. Her father had scolded her later, but the great fur coat he made out of it for her told her that he was proud of her feat.

She's never tried bribing merchants of a desert city in her life though.

Though it is a first, she walks with confidence to the flea market where several of these merchant trucks are parked. They are massive, tall and wide to fit items inside of the back easily. She tugs the blue veil over her left cheek and saunters in.

She stands in front of a man around the same height as Hyunjin. A bright orange scarf wraps around his head, beady black eyes peering down at her. She piques his interest right away, her pale hair shining blue underneath the fabric over her head.

"You are the outlander. The lady they talk about," he muses, voice thick with an accent that both Mother Barbada, the royals and the family she works for throughout the day don't speak with. The royals said that there are other settlements on this continent— Mother Barbada had confirmed this also so she assumes he must be a travelling merchant around numerous settlements.

Which means information. And if there's anything that her team and newfound family have in common, it's the love of free information.

"I have yet to see another woman like myself here," She replies. Her own accent makes him frown a bit, unaccustomed to hearing her type of accent and she flushes when she thinks that he has trouble understanding her. "No. You are the only one I have seen with such a... pale palette," he gazes up and down her body, his eyes lingering on her face. She wants to pull her veil closer but she doesn't, still unsure where their conversation is going. "I have travelled across the whole desert and the rainforests beneath but I have never seen someone like you,"

"I wouldn't expect it," She muses gently. This desert and her homeland are the opposites of each other. The desert is dry and hot, Scalva is freezing, covered in snow and a persistent dampness in the air from all the snow the sunlight melts and turns into a vapour that sits in the air until another snowfall.

"I have come to give you an offer," she begins to say and his brows raise. Her face contorts into a glare and she watches as he flinches before shuffling in his spot, obviously intimidated by her. "All you have to do is leave your post for at least an hour, maximum four hours," she tells him, then looks at his items on display. "I can guarantee that we can pay you more than all these items you have... perhaps even doubled..." She leans in to whisper in his ear.

"So what will it be?"

His mouth stretches into a grin. "I am a respectful gentleman, it would be rude to refuse such a lovely woman's offer," he tilts his head down to her. "Now what am I to do?"

"Gather up your other merchant friends. They will get rewarded, too. Meet me at the gate in half an hour with all of you otherwise you all miss out," she whispers before sauntering off. "Oh," She calls over her shoulder, "In your trucks, too,"

And now she can definitely check bribery off on her list.

“How many do you think will come?” Chan questions her and she shrugs. “Hopefully enough,” She grits out. “It was much easier than I thought, hopefully, he’s money hungry enough to come,”

“It seems like a pretty good deal to me,” Chan replies and Valkyrie hums in agreement. Rumbling fills the street and then several trucks pull up to the gates. The man she talked to before pokes his head out the window from where he drives the big vehicle.

“Got room for two in there?” Valkyrie calls up to him and he blinks before nodding. They haul themselves up and sit on the leathery seats. “Where to now?”

“The desert,” Valkyrie answers. He raises a brow at Chan. “And who’s he?”

They’re quiet for a few seconds. “My brother,” She answers and Chan is pretty amused although he hides it. The man peers at them, eyes flickering to and from their faces. “Huh,” he murmurs. “Adopted?”

“Something like that,” Chan answers. “Now let’s drive. Will all your friends follow you?” He nods and puts both hands on the steering wheel.

“Oh, dear...” The man whispers when he sees the ship. They arrived much quicker than the other times they’d ridden camels and they find the rest of their group huddled around a frame big enough for the ship to sit in high off the sand.

Valkyrie jumps across Chan’s lap to get out of the truck. She was always fine on the ship, but the moment they’d reached the first dune she’d gone green. Chan isn’t sure if it’s the aftermaths of the concussion she copped or travel sickness.

She hurries to Hyunjin who hugs her tightly before she bends, her hands on her knees as she breathes in deep.

“And what exactly are we doing out here?” The merchant asks six others with similarly styled clothing behind him. “Getting the ship out,” He points to it and smiles. “Got rope?” They gape at him,

looking between one another wearily.

“What’s this?” Valkyrie asks Minho, pointing at the large frame they’ve built in the time it took her and Chan to rally the merchants. “A frame for the ship once we get it out,” he answers her as he tightens a bolt in the black metal. “So once we get it out we can take a look at it easier,” Jisung adds and Valkyrie hums in interest.

Minho looks over at the merchants and smiles. “You got more than I expected would come,” He raises a brow as they walk towards them. “You did tell them what we wanted them for?”

Valkyrie frowns. “Of course not,” And Minho stares at her. “What?”

“Well think about it, had I asked for them to come help get the outlanders ship out after the royals threw us out of the palace what do you think they would’ve said?” She hisses out and Minho grimaces. “I suppose you’re right...” He mutters.

“Yeah. You just keep your brain wired on all your... mechanical stuff, I’ll do the bribery,” Hyunjin chuckles at her and Jisung peers at Minho who’s now staring at the group of merchants in front of them.

With more bribery from Valkyrie, they’re convinced rather quickly to help them. Minho and another three mechanics from Mydar help them tie ropes from their trucks to their ship and soon enough, the three ships are tied and they’re ready to pull it out.

“Okay, all you have to do is drive in the direction back to the city, right?” Minho shouts out, gaining yells from their trucks in response. He gives them a thumbs up and turns to the ships. “Everyone ready?” They nod and Minho sighs in relief, boarding the ship himself.

“Let’s go, Boss,” one of the mechanics says to Minho who laughs at him before he nods.

The ships lift off first, hovering over the ground before lifting, giving the signal for the merchants to drive their heavy trucks forwards. A groan echos through the ship and Chan grips onto Felix and Jisung who are next to him. With a sudden buckle, the ship propels

backwards and with a great roar of flowing sand, their ship becomes free, dragging along the sand towards the ramp leading up to the supporting frame.

“A little to the right!” Jisung hears Minhø call from the front of the control panel. “That’s it, okay good we need to go slow, we can’t risk ripping the panels off it,”

With a screech, the ship is dragged up the ramp and falls in place on the frame. Everyone holds their breath as the ships lower and the merchants stop, getting out of their trucks to witness what they’d all just done.

Cheers erupt in the ships, across the radios that give them the ability to make easy contact with each other. The doors open and they rush out, huddling around the ship sitting in the frame. Sand falls from every nook and cranny in it and Jisung knows they’ll be finding sand in the ship for years to come.

It takes the mechanics and Minhø around half an hour to find to issue with the ship. The power generator was fine, but the wires hooking it up to the rest of the ship had fried. Minhø believes it to be from the differences in temperature outside. They stayed in cooler parts of the world for quite some time before the extreme heat of the desert surrounded them. The expansion of the metal has warped around the power source, creating an imbalance in the temperature regulation.

“You can fix it though?” Chan asks him and he nods, the other mechanics also nodding. “With all of us on it... maybe a week or two at the most. We’ll need to make a few new parts for sure,”

Minhø turns to Jisung, a big smile across his face. Jisung’s heart thumps loudly in his chest, dimming the sounds surrounding him out as he stares at him. “I said I’d get you back, hmm?” He pulls him gently by his elbow, embracing him into a hug that is warm and oddly comfortable even though the temperature around them is definitely not hugging weather.

“Well, we should get started,” One of the older mechanics say. “The faster we start, the sooner you can return to Mydar,” he smiles softly and Minhø pulls away from the hug he enveloped Jisung in. He nods

his head in agreement and just as they go to board the ship, Valkyrie's scream alerts them all.

A golden rope is constricting her around her waist. She digs against the folds of her blue dress, searching for daggers she typically has on her. Hyunjin and Chan leap off the ship, running through the sand. But she's being dragged away quickly and the blades that she finds are useless to the grip of the golden lasso around her.

"No!" She screams when people rush out of the ships. Jisung peers over at the merchants as his feet hit the sand and he watches them zooming off in their vehicles. He hisses and just as a rumbling fills the air around them, a larger truck than two of the merchants combined appears over a sand dune. Several people dressed in shining black and orange robes are huddled around it. He spots the golden handle in one of their hands and with a gasp, Chan and Hyunjin are taken, followed by Kaya and three other women. Jisung screams when Felix turns back to him just as one wraps around his waist, pulling him through the hot sand. His friend cries out and Jisung rushes forwards, only to be held back by Minhoo.

"They're taking them all!" Minhoo hisses and the younger breaks out of his grip. "Right! And I'll be damned if they take our friends and hurt them!" He rushes forwards and Minhoo doesn't have a choice but to follow him. People around them are being captured by the metal ropes and eventually being thrown into the back of the truck.

Jisung feels the sting of the rope wrapping around him before the hot sand burns his skin as he's dragged through it.

→

They're brought to their knees in the same room Jisung had felt fury take over him.

The three women stand before them, eyes burning down at them.

"We gave you clear orders that you were on your own," The woman that wore gold last time now wears a soft pink and silver gown that

drapes down her left shoulder, wrapping at her hips where it then falls to her feet. Her eyes are just as unforgiving as last time and instead of keeping quiet like last time, Jisung roars at her.

“We are just trying to get home!” Her mouth presses into a thin line and the youngest of the three women, dressed in yellows and oranges stares down at him. “You dare speak that way to Queen Malti?” The older woman now in tones of earth hisses at her. “Hold off, Amira,” She tells her and the younger woman drawls back, but holds her glare.

Queen Malti stands taller and crosses her arms covered in golden jewellery over her embroidered clothing. “You danger our city with your dangerous words, and now your actions,” She hisses out. The other woman places a hand on her arm, trying to draw her back. “Don’t,” she spits out instead and her hand slowly falls.

“You dare go against our word?” She grits out.

“You wouldn’t listen to us,” Jisung spits out and she glares down at him, her teeth bared. “Why would I listen to an outlanders word without any proof?”

The doors open again then and all their backup from Mydar is thrown in. Jisung looks up at her again, his head tilting. “You wish for proof?” He hisses out and her brows furrow. “Than that’s what we’ll give you!”

He spins on his knees, gets to his feet and rushes to Minhó who has the caller in the small bag sung over his shoulder. The guards surrounding them lunge for him, one grabs him around his hips and with a swift movement, has a blade pressed to his throat. Jisung stares at his friends who are on their feet in an instant.

Minhó fights out of the golden rope he was contained in as they let down their guard to catch Jisung and it falls. Now free, he flies forwards, gripping the weapon by the blade that is pressed to Jisung’s throat. It slices open his hand almost on impact and he clutches it, moving it so he now holds the hilt, he fights Jisung out of his grip.

A roar from behind him tells him Chan and their other friends have

entered their own battles.

“Shit,” Minho mutters, eyes gazing over at Jisung. “Duck!” The younger quickly yells and crouches low just as a whip cracks out. It grazes just over Minho’s arm as he falls with him. Searing pain burns at his skin and the warm wetness trickling down his arm tells him it wasn’t a soft hit at all. Fury burns in him when he realises what damage it could’ve caused if it hit them with its full force.

“We need to call them,” Jisung cries out as they spin around the ground, dodging hits from the guards. Minho reaches his hand into his bag, and he shoots a worried look at Jisung when he doesn’t feel the hard surface of the caller. Jisung looks back at where they had been and spots it underneath a guard. Specifically, the guard wielding the whip. Minho shakes his head at him, but he’s up on his haunches quickly, rushing to it.

Minho watches in horror as the whip cracks down and just before the sickening cracking noise fills his ears, there's a flash of blue and white-blonde hair.

Valkyrie throws herself against the man, tackling him to the ground. She sits on his chest, takes both of his wrists in her grasp. He tries to throw her off, then tries his best to flip them but her knee slides up against his throat and with a quick knock to his temple, he’s knocked out. In that little bit of time Valkyrie saved them, Jisung reaches the caller and with shaky hands, he presses the button to connect to the two women back in Mydar.

Valkyrie gets to her feet and rushes to Jisung. “We need to somehow get their attention without getting ourselves injured by them,” she hurries out and Jisung nods. Valkyrie throws a fist at a guard running for them. He flops to the ground while she hisses, clutching her hand.

Fern picks up and her eyes widen at the commotion around them. Jisung ducks a punch, pulling Valkyrie with him. Minho smashes into him, forcing him away by a harsh kick to his chest.

“What’s going on?” She looks around the screen, eyes flickering to the fight around them. Kaya lands on the ground near them, a guard reaching his arm up with those metal lassos. Valkyrie intercepts it,

gripping the hilt of the weapon and quickly spinning to capture him in it instead. She offers a hand to Kaya who takes it gratefully.

“They ambushed us when we had just gotten the ship out. They say we are a danger to their city and this...” He quickly flips the caller to show her the fight. Valkyrie hovers around, protecting him with Minh from any oncoming threat. She spots Hyunjin and she signals him over. He slides over, quickly getting to his feet to cage around his friend talking to Fern.

“If we don’t prove it soon, we might end up dead,” he hisses out just as Isa appears. “Can you get to the front? To where those rulers are?” She says instantly. Jisung forgets that she is the general of Mydar’s forces, and that’s what she’s done for all her life.

“Yes,” Valkyrie answers for him. “We can get you there,”

Chan spots her swinging through the crowd, beginning to make a path while Minh stays back with Jisung. Hyunjin is behind his wife, helping her when she needs it and clearing guards on his side. Chan slips next to them, pushing Mydar citizens away from the battle.

Jisung rushes through the gap, hugging the device to his chest. Valkyrie is fighting against a man twice her size and when he slips up, Jisung takes the chance to slide by him.

His arm grips around his waist, squeezing him painfully by his side. Jisung chokes out but the royals are right there, Amira, the younger woman hugged close to the unnamed queen's chest, fear glazing over her eyes as she watches. Her eyes widen at him and he stares at them, a strangled cry parting from his lips when his jaw is taken by a large hand with an almost crushing force.

The queens’ eyes widen and he thrusts his hand forwards, the caller pointing towards them. “Please!” He shouts or tries to at least. He feels a pair of hands wrap around his thighs, yanking him backwards. He lands on Minh’s lap, his head on his shoulder as he heaves in a deep breath. Minh heaves out a deep breath and just as he tries to get up, Queen Malti raises a hand.

The guards halt, just like that.

“Jisung?” He hears Fern call him through the speakers and he blinks before he makes eye contact with Queen Malti.

“What is this?” Her eyes narrow at the screen that Jisung is still holding out to them. A baby’s cry echos throughout the screen and Jisung hurries to his feet, his body responding to the cry of his daughter. His mouth goes dry. “This is proof,” He tells her, keeping the screen steady as she peers at the women across the world.

“Hello,” Fern’s voice fills the now silent room. “My name is Fern Mydar, what my son speaks of is true,” warmth spreads through Jisung’s body at her words. He watches both the queens look at him before their eyes return to Fern. “You ask for proof?” There is a pause before a soft laugh. “You have the proof right before you. In the flesh, but you want more than that? Here you go,”

The royals faces contort into confusion before they stare, blank. Jisung peeks at the screen and his eyes widen at the faces of all the other leaders. Jisung isn’t sure how she’s done it but by Minho’s sigh, he just knows he has something to do with it.

“These people are our allies. The face of our power. If you hurt them, you hurt all of us. I am sure I do not need to elaborate what I mean by that,” Odin’s voice booms through the caller. Valkyrie shuffles around at the sound of her father’s voice. “But you do not realise what destruction lays in the near future,” Fern says.

“They are true about the war. About everything,”

The queens slowly look to them, faces softened in fear.

“Was that enough for you?” Jisung spits out and by the look on the women’s faces, yes. Yes, it’s enough.

→

Jisung collapses on his bed. Minho’s follows him, careful of his bandaged arm— courtesy of Hyunjin. The wounds weren’t deep enough to need stitches, but Hyunjin thinks the thicker wounds might

scar. Minho doesn't care, if it wasn't his arm it would've been Jisung's back.

"Do you think the parts will be easy to make?" Jisung asks him softly. Minho hums, low in his throat. Jisung swallows thickly and crawls underneath his sheets. Exhaustion weighs down on him, heavy and unforgiving.

"Since the queens have finally found their proof and offered supplies, I think it'll be much easier. We still have to craft it for the ship, but getting the materials to do that will be much easier,"

"At least it helps," he whispers back and Minho nods with a soft yes.

"Soon we'll be back in the skies. A step closer to Mydar,"

"A step closer to war," Jisung mutters before he gives in to sleep. Minho stares at him, his hands are suddenly clammy. "Yes," he whispers, eyes drifting to his lap. "Yes, we are,"

→

A week later, Minho and the mechanics have finished making most of the parts. Jisung was busy helping Mother Barbada feed all the new people. He, Changbin, Felix and Seungmin had been made servers by the woman, helping her make food and serve it to everyone. Jisung makes sure to sneak extra fruit to Minho when Mother Barbada isn't looking but she gives off this odd vibe that makes Jisung know that she's always watching. Somehow.

It reminds him of the time Minho was working on fixing the boat all those months ago. It feels so far away, back then. He and Minho back then didn't talk all too much, not like they are now and Jisung smiles to himself when he thinks of their previous memories together.

He thinks back to the night of blurry festival lights, the night Minho barged into his room in the institution. He recalls his face, blank and void of emotion, his hand that caught him in his fear.

Jisung bites down on his lip when he remembers how he had gripped

him before throwing the both of them off a mountain. How the air was so cold, but Minhø's body heat was so warm that night in the cave when he found out about Eunbyul's presence. Overmorrow.

He sees Minhø's face in the darkness again, his hand pressed against his rounded middle feeling the first movements of Eunbyul inside him.

The weight of exhaustion he has only felt once in his life, but the feeling of a warm body and arms around him kept him grounded.

Jisung halts in his step. He looks at the man his mind has constantly flickered to and from for too long. He's focused on his work and Jisung suddenly feels blood warm, his pulse singing beneath his skin at the sight of him.

Minho looks up and they lock eyes. His heart drums loudly in his chest. Minhø smiles and he smiles back his heart stuttering.

Jisung feels like he cannot move, like he can't speak but just stare at the man that has made a home in his heart without him even realising. It has been Minhø from the start. He was his beginning, he's been his yesterday and Jisung hopes he will be his overmorrow.

→

Notes for the Chapter:

HI !!! I'm so glad everyone is enjoying this story so far ☐ all the lovely comments u guys leave makes me want to EXPLODE

Also i am 100% sure these typos everywhere and I apologise idk why I can't type (and sometimes i rllly can't spell...) but I probably wont ever get around to editing this fic... whoops

I think i know how long this fic is going to be andddd I'm thinking its going to end around chapter sixty! So a little bit more to go! But I'm also working on some other things atm too :DDD

Have a great week everyone!

Ps. Pls tell me if u have a favourite scene! I'm really interested!! <333

Minho thrusts his fist in the air in celebration. The last piece they needed the fix the ship has been completed and Jisung laughs at him as he begins dancing around the room. “Sung! You know what this means! We can fix the ship now and be on our way!”

Jisung watches him in his joy for a few moments before he reaches out for him. “It’s late,” he says as he points to the sky with his free hand. Minho follows the line of his fingers to see the moon high in the sky, round and shining with pale silver light. “We should sleep and tomorrow we can work on the ship. I’m sure we’ll have plenty of hands to get it flying in no time,”

Minho nods in agreement and puts the metal piece down on the table. The palm leaves sway in the soft breeze and leaves rustle on the ground. “Thank you,” Minho mutters to him. Jisung blinks at him but ends up smiling at him. He’s not sure why he is thanking him, but before he can ask, Minho is hurrying away to shower.

He’s in bed when Minho enters their room. He hovers over him before giving in and slipping beside him. Jisung smiles in the dark and shuffles closer to him.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do this all without you,”

Jisung falls asleep with a soft smile and the warmth of Minho keeping him safe throughout the night.

→

The heat of the desert is almost unbearable to work in.

Jisung heaves a deep breath in before sweeping more sand out of the ship. Mother Barbada is helping clean the control room that was once coated in old, dried blood. The sand that has blown into the ship over the weeks it had been lying dormant stuck in the sand has caused a

build-up of sand inside the ship. When they first arrived in the morning, the mounds of sand in the ship had surprised them all. A group of fifteen or so people have been working since the morning on getting it all out, some of them also going around and checking for broken parts in the interior of the ship.

Minho and his team opened the ship as soon as they arrived and he's been down there with four other mechanics working out how to install everything right. Jisung wonders how he's doing in the bright sun. He's hot enough inside the ship and he just knows it's got to be worse exposed to the burning sun.

Mother Barbada huffs as she exits the control room. "We've been working for hours," She sighs, shaking her head. "They're getting lunch ready," Jisung points to one of the smaller ships that Mydar citizens have been cooking in to refresh everyone working on the ship. "We'll have a break soon,"

Minho appears at the entrance of the ship. Sweat trickles down his bare back, the hair at the base of his neck slick with sweat, too. He's given up his shirt and taken his red sheer shawl and flipped one end over his shoulder, the other tucked in the waistband of his opposite hip. His skin glows beneath the sun, soaking up the rays and turning shades darker than he was in Scalva. The red fabric sparkles in the sun, his skin below sparkling like rubies. Jisung feels his body grow hotter and Minho then meets his eyes, smiling wide.

"You look like you need a break," Jisung tells him and Minho sighs out before nodding. "You look rather bothered yourself..." Unlike Minho— and Chan who he sees walking up to the ship— he hasn't altered the turquoise fabric he wears, although his skin sticks to it uncomfortably.

"The heat is just trapped in here," Minho grimaces when he steps in. "Come for a break, yeah?" Minho gives him a smile before running down the ramp, tackling Jeongin who's walking to the ship for a break, too.

Jisung turns away and presses both his hands to his cheeks, breathing in heavily. He bites down on his lip, trying to slow the sudden rapid beating of his heart.

When he opens his eyes, Mother Barbada is staring at him with a knowing look in her eyes. "Come here, I'll help you arrange your clothes," he hobbles over to her and she grips the hem of his shirt, lifting it to just cover the top of his chest. "I know you are a bit different to the other boys. Not wanting to expose yourself much," She murmurs as she tugs his short sleeves to bundle at his biceps. The slight breeze brushes over his now exposed skin and he sighs in relief, feeling his skin cool a little after being freed from the fabric covering him up. She grabs his shawl and ties it around his chest, the excess fabric flows down his back, but it's thin enough to let the breeze hit his back.

"Now go, you should cool down more this way," he hurries off to the other ship, his stomach growling and his mouth dry.

When he enters the other ship, cool air washes over him and he sighs in relief but his cheeks then flush bright red when he catches Minho's eye.

The elder is staring at him, his lips parted as he stares. He doesn't try to hide that he's looking at him. His eyes trail down his smooth abdomen barring iridescent marks against his honey toned skin from how he grew with Eunbyul. His eyes follow the dips of his bare waist, down to his hips. Jisung feels a lot more exposed than he actually is and he only moves towards the table where they're serving food when Felix appears by his side, linking their arms together. Felix has thrown off his shirt somewhere too and Jisung feels a little self-conscious of how he didn't do the same but he has his reasons to not want to. He's always been a bit insecure about his body, how it's changed after going through the changes he was forced through and bearing a child.

"I cannot wait to have this ship fixed," Felix groans as he holds onto a plate, waiting for Kaya to scoop food onto his plate. "Me either," Jisung sighs. "I think we're going to find sand in it for years after this, though," he sighs and Felix laughs. "I don't think anyone will ever get rid of the sand," he muses and thanks Kaya as she fills both their plates and hands them a pitcher of water each.

Valkyrie pokes her head through theirs, "I have never felt so disgusting in my life," she whines out and they turn to find her with

her shirt tied around her chest like Jisung, her pants rolled up to her thighs. Her cheeks are bright red and she's sweating.

"Wow, you wouldn't be able to tell you're from the snow," Felix snorts and the young woman sighs out. "I think after we're done in the City of Sivra, I'm never coming back..."

"Only if it's required too," Hyunjin sings, passing her water which she gulps down. "My body is not made for this type of heat..." Hyunjin's left his cropped shirt on, but his pants are rolled up to his knees.

Hyunjin pulls her to a table where others are sat at and Jisung and Felix follow, plonking themselves down after them. Minhø pulls up a chair in front of Jisung. He feels his heart thump at the sight of him, but he still greets the elder with a smile.

"How much longer do you think it'll take?" Jisung asks him after he swallows a mouthful of fresh fruit.

"I don't think we'll finish the repairs today," Minhø sighs. "We have to leave a few hours before sunset so we don't have to travel in the dark and before the temperature drops, so I'll say only the mechanics and I are going to need to come after today. The ship is fixed inside?"

"It looks almost as good as it did when we first took off from Mydar," Felix answers Minhø and Jisung nods along with him. "It looks pretty good, actually. You could tell that we crashed from the inside, now,"

"Well, that's something that we can tick off then!" Hyunjin cheers happily and Valkyrie smile wide, happy to hear the news she doesn't have to suffer in the desert heat anymore. Chan slides in next to Felix, smiling broadly at everyone.

It's quiet as they eat for a bit before Jisung speaks up. "I was talking to Fern not long ago," he mutters and they look up from their plates to him. "And she asked if we were going to come home to Mydar after we fix the ship or if we'll find more settlements,"

Minhø cocks his head at him. "And I said I didn't know,"

"There's more settlements we could travel to?" Valkyrie has a small grimace on her face as she says it. "A whole other continent," Minhø

answers. "I think it's worth it to go. The more people on our side, the better, isn't it?"

"If it's a whole continent, there could be a lot more people, too," Chan adds. "Like here. And we're lucky we don't have to visit them all, thankfully the royals will do that part,"

"I say we go, then, too," Valkyrie says and Jisung slowly nods. "Well, I guess there's our answer. Jeongin already said he's okay to go to another few settlements," Jisung adds. "I spoke to him this morning,"

"Seungmin and Changbin say yes," Seungmin chimes in and they laugh at him. "Settled, then," Changbin says from his side.

→

Jisung pushes the last pile of sand out of the door, watching it fall down the ramp just as the sun is beginning to shine its rays in a different direction. He slides down the ramp, the soles of his flat shoes slipping on all the sand. Jeongin laughs at him and offers him a hand up. Jisung takes it and laughs at himself.

"I'm going to catch a ride in the ship instead of riding back. I'm taking Mother Barbada with me," he tells him and Jisung cocks his head at him. "You get the easy way out," Jisung jokes and the younger smiles. "I just don't want her straining herself too much," Jeongin shrugs. "She acts like she's fine but I see her holding that hip of hers," he tuts and then waves goodbye to him.

Jisung wanders to where the camels are and slides onto the back of the one Minho is sitting on. His chest touches Minho's slick skin and warmth coils in his belly at the feeling of his bare skin against his own.

They rode the camels in to save on fuel on the smaller ships. They were going back to Mydar as soon as the ship is fixed and being on to help during the day depletes a fair bit of fuel. They were used to the

ride now, too so it doesn't really bother them.

Or it didn't usually bother Jisung. But now with his bare skin sliding against Minhø's as the camel walks, he finds himself shuffling, his body tensing at every stumble movement from the elder. He feels his back stretch out unconsciously, probably uncomfortable after all his work on the ship. He watches as his muscles flex and Jisung stares before shutting his eyes tightly.

It takes around an hour and a half to ride back to the city gates and as soon as he gets the chance to get off, he takes it. Although he feels strangely empty without Minhø's touch on him, he feels the simmering heat in his belly slowly cool down as they walk back to Mother Barbada's.

The sun has set when they enter and Jisung lingers around the courtyard, collapsing by the fountain as they all wander back in to shower, eat and collapse in their beds.

"Hey," Jisung startles at Hyunjin's voice and turns, his eyes wide when his friend settles next to him.

"Oh... hi," he greets him with a small smile. Hyunjin's lips stretch before he laughs at him. Jisung stares at him, unsure why his friend is laughing in his face.

"You like Minhø," he blurts out and Jisung stares at him with wide eyes. Blood rushes to his cheeks and he stands, his feet shuffling along the tiled ground. Hyunjin raises a brow at him and watches him. "You can't deny it anymore," Hyunjin tells him.

Jisung blinks at him. He's only become aware of his own feelings not long ago at all, but Hyunjin knows. He knows. And Jisung panics at the thought of Minhø already knowing. He's been able to read him pretty well as it is, too.

"Hey," Hyunjin frowns and places a hand on his arm. "Don't panic, it's okay, really," he smiles again and Jisung bites down on his bottom lip.

"I'm glad," his friend whispers and Jisung blinks at him, their eyes

locking. Hyunjin reaches for his hand and gives it a reassuring squeeze.

“That you’ve found someone you like... that you’ve developed these feelings over time. Out of trust and love...”

Jisung’s mouth is dry and he gulps. “I don’t think I’ve ever apologised for my actions towards you before... and it's well overdue. I’m sorry. For taking advantage of you when you were fragile and I should’ve known better, yet it was you who had to break things off. I’m sorry for how I treated you,”

“I said I forgave you,” Jisung responds softly and Hyunjin smiles and shakes his head. “You deserve a proper apology. And Minho... That’s something beautiful you have.”

“And you with Valkyrie,” Jisung replies in a gentle tone. He watches his friends eyes light up at the mere mention of her. It warms his heart. “Thank you,” Hyunjin pats his arm softly. “I didn’t know how lucky I was to say I’d marry her when we first met. But now I just... I’m kind of in awe,” Jisung smiles broadly at his friend who sighs dreamily.

“But you and Minho,” he clears his throat as he stands. “Don’t hide it. You might just be surprised,” he then walks off, leaving Jisung dumbfounded by the fountain.

→

Jisung breathes in the scent of rose petals as he soaks in the bath. His mind hasn’t stopped wandering over Hyunjin’s words and his accusing tone when he said he likes Minho.

Jisung does.

These past few days have proved that he truly does and there’s absolutely nothing he can do to change it. Jisung doesn’t want to either. He enjoys the way his hands feel around his waist, how his skin felt against his today, how his breath warms his skin when he

slides into his bed, his body warmth lulling him quicker to sleep.

He closes his eyes, his head gently hitting the back of the bath as he falls deeper into the scented water. The warm water is soothing his tired muscles and he feels clean of sweat and sand.

Jisung isn't entirely sure how it has taken him this long to fall for him. Looking at him with Eunbyul made his heart swell impossibly large, the way he was so tender and careful with her, cradling her like she's a treasure from above. Jisung smiles at the thought and he lets himself imagine them in the future, a bigger Eunbyul playing with Minho in a garden while he watches with a smaller child in his hold.

Jisung peels his eyes open at the sudden thought and his eyes widen before he shoves himself down in the bath, wondering where such a thought had come from.

Jisung peers down at his friends.

Felix is lounging across his bed, Valkyrie reclined with her head on his thighs and Seungmin is folding clothes on the floor next to the low bed.

"You look like you're about to combust any second," Felix snorts at him and Valkyrie raises a brow at him.

"Maybe I will," Jisung sighs out, before falling onto the bed, knocking his head on Valkyrie's knee who promptly pushes him off the bed in retaliation. "Hey!" He whines and she rolls her eyes at him before pulling him back up.

"How did you and Hyunjin happen?" He suddenly says and she goes to push him off again but Jisung dodges her attack. "Uh... it kind of just happened? I don't really know, we were half asleep, really..." then her eyes narrow at him. "Why?"

Felix springs up and points an accusing finger at him.

“Oh, you’ve finally figured it out!” He cheers. They all look at him as he scrambles to take Jisung’s shoulders in his hands.

Jisung shuffles out of his grasp and gazes at him with a slight grimace. “What...” he whispers and Felix scoffs. “I’m not gonna say it in case I’m wrong and spoil it for you,” he huffs and Seungmin sighs.

“It’s written all over him, Felix... didn’t you see them today?” Felix cackles and slaps his knee. “What a show,” he whispers and Valkyrie raises a brow before realisation dawns on her too.

“What do you all know!?” Jisung cries out, his brows knitted together tightly.

“You say it!” Felix tells him. “What you first came to us for!” Jisung stares at him before taking a deep breath. He closes his eyes and spits it out, “How do I tell Minho I like him?!”

The room is quiet for a bit before Felix giggles and Valkyrie slaps his arm for him to shut up. Her eyes are soft as she looks at Jisung and in moments like these, Jisung forgets she’s younger than them all, younger by Jeongin by a few months, too. “So that’s it,” she mutters gently and then she smiles, wide and the ring on her lip presses against her skin softly.

“Maybe you should just tell him?” Seungmin suggests, coming to sit with them all now as well. Jisung looks at him with a soft smile. Seungmin grins at him and takes his hand, his thumb rubbing over his knuckles gently. “It depends on what you want after you admit that to him,” Valkyrie pipes up.

“Or maybe he won’t have to,” Felix muses and Seungmin shoots him a glare while Valkyrie elbows him.

“I... we’ve been together for so long now...” Jisung smiles softly. “We’ve all had our moments,” his eyes flicker to Valkyrie and he remembers Hyunjin’s apology. They’ve all been through so much, trial and error with relationships and barriers that they continuously pushed until it broke and opened up for bonds as strong as the ones they have now.

This group, these people Jisung has spent the beginnings of his life with are his true family. The people he can't live without.

He and Hyunjin were okay now, back to being good friends with no hard feelings or regret. And although Jisung is afraid to tell Minho, in case he doesn't feel the same and doesn't want the same things, he knows he won't live a life of misery next to him. He could live with him as a friend— as something deeper— but as long as they stick together in the end, that's what truly matters to him. But Jisung craves him in a way he's never felt before.

He wonders how it would be to kiss him. If his lips would be soft and warm like they look, his hands gripping at his body, exploring the dips of his defined muscles, the curve of his waistline. Jisung's cheeks grow warm but all his friends can do is smile at him.

"Don't worry too much, Jisung," Seungmin tells him softly with a kind smile. "Minho is good for you," Felix adds on and Valkyrie nods in agreement. Jisung fidgets in his spot, his eyes turning down to his palms as he chews on his bottom lip, flustered. "And you're good for him," she says.

Jisung feels warmth filter through his blood. A happy warmth, unlike the raging hot anger he's felt before. He feels content, braver maybe.

→

Jisung stares up at the stars glittering against the dark canvas of the night sky.

The night air is cool around him and the grass he lays on is soft, plush underneath his fingers that rake through it as he stares up at the constellations above him.

It's been a while now. A time since Jisung would lay on the earth, staring up to the abyss of stars overhead. He had been anxious at most moments then, but the blanket of the sky was endless, comforting to see them always there night after night.

Jisung finds it almost overwhelming that not long ago he was so alone, hated every breath because he believed his future was set in stone for him, and now he is free, his life his own to control.

He once thought he would be living a solitary life with nothing but the sound of his heartbeat drumming dully in his ears, yet he isn't. He can make the most of this life he's been given a second chance to live.

Jisung perks up, his eyes tearing away from the stars when he feels someone lay next to him. His own body heat seeps against his skin, and his nerve ends flicker alive, buzzing to reach for him.

Minho turns his head and their eyes connect. A soft smile appears over Minho's mouth, the corners of his shapely lips pulling up, his eyes sparkling in the cool starlight.

Jisung has been given a second shot at life, one that has given him more than he ever imagined already. He tells himself it is not greedy to want— because he wants him so bad. To feel his fingers over his skin, his lips against him, to know how pure love feels. He wants Minho.

Minho was his beginning.

Unknown to the boy he once was in the facility, that man breaking into his room and running out into the cool night would once overtake his mind, invade his senses and make him want.

Want his love, his touch, his tenderness that he treats his daughter with, a future that is reminiscent of blooming flower fields and starlit nights.

"The stars again?" Minho whispers softly and Jisung finds himself humming, but he can't tear his eyes away from the man in front of him.

Jisung suddenly props himself up on his elbows and Minho startles gently before pulling himself up too.

"When you told me about overmorrow," Jisung says and suddenly his throat is dry with the remembrance of that time. He swears he feels

the icy chill of the cave and the weighed down feeling of being saturated with rain. "I..." Jisung licks his lips. Minhø's stare is suddenly akin to those predatory gazes he knew him for and Jisung shivers. He'd never get used to that look in his eyes, burning and deep.

"I don't think we'd be here now if it wasn't for that... so I guess I owe you a thank you," Jisung murmurs it under his breath, his eyes flickering back to the elders face. His gazes haven't softened but his lips are pulled into a gentle smile.

"I thought it would give you some comfort at that moment," Minhø reveals and Jisung blinks at him before he smiles. "It did." Jisung sighs out heavily. "More than anything at that time, I found comfort in that... with everything we had escaped from it sounded so far away. Overmorrow. I had grown hearing from people that tomorrow wasn't guaranteed," his eyes narrow at the memory. "I never doubted that... in the facility I sometimes wished I wouldn't have a tomorrow," he sees Minhø's face fall and he reaches his hand out, squeezing his hand with little reassuring pumps. Jisung smiles at the action.

"It haunted me everywhere. Out in the wild... I pushed and pushed each day to go further, push myself past my limits because I didn't want my tomorrow to run away from me," he pauses and locks eyes with Minhø. "Chasing for an overmorrow is better," he whispers. "I can fight for this... and for Eunbyul, everyone else I love," he grips Minhø's hand tighter, "We can stop saying a tomorrow isn't guaranteed because now we are setting our overmorrow in stone."

"I like that," Minhø murmurs under his breath. His silhouette is illuminated by moonlight, rich silver that creates a glow around his body. Jisung thinks he glows like the stars.

He reaches out, his hand pressed against where his heart beats beneath his skin and breathes in when his hand is illuminated.

Jisung doesn't believe in soulmates, but he finds it so extraordinary that they been so significant to each other ever since they met. Somehow they are two souls, connected in some way, whether it be by an invisible thread that ties them together or like the gravitational

pull of souls, like the way stars orbit around space to meet over and over again— Jisung likes the idea of them being stars, meeting and making a brilliant constellation.

“If I knew it meant that much to you maybe I should’ve said it before?” Jisung smiles wide at him and he shakes his head. “The timing... that’s what made it so impactful...”

It’s quiet for a few more moments until Minhø rises, holding out a hand for Jisung to take. He lets Minhø haul him to his feet and they take a few steps, going in the direction of the rooms.

Jisung halts in his steps then.

“Minhø,” he calls and swiftly, the elder turns back, his head cocking at him softly. Jisung takes a deep breath and he gulps, his fingers twitch.

“I...I... How do you feel about me?” He suddenly gets out and Minhø takes a soft step closer to him.

“You’re my friend,” he begins to say but Jisung furrows his brows at him.

“No,” he tells him. “Friends don’t do the things you do for me,” he watches as Minhø’s ears turn pink and how his lips part for him to talk, but he lets out a laugh then. It warms Jisung but it leaves him rather confused more than anything.

“You know about Hyunjin and I,” Jisung says and Minhø’s laughter halts, his brows knitting. “And the feelings I had for Hyunjin weren’t like... they weren’t anything like this! Like how I feel for you!” He rushes out the last parts of his words and as he peels his eyes open after he shut them during his rush of speech, hands enclose around his waist, warm and welcome.

His touch alights his skin on fire and he locks eyes with Minhø.

His eyes are a fraction wider, his mouth parted softly, and Jisung wonders what it would be like to press his lips against his.

But Minhø suddenly speaks, his voice an octave deeper and it sinks

into Jisung's bones, fuelling the fire that is growing in the depths of his belly. "How do you feel for me? Tell me," it's almost breathless like he has no more oxygen in his starving lungs.

"I want you," Jisung's eyes light up in the faint moonlight. His lips are pink, and look as soft as satin to Minho. He has always wanted to swoop down and steal a kiss, but he's never looked so inviting as he does now, his round eyes bright and his pulse quick under his hands.

"I want you. The feeling of safety when you hold me, the warmth of your touch, your tenderness, how you look at me and things feel right," he tells him honestly because there's no other way he can get it out just how much he feels for him. "I want to feel your love... however you do that. I just want you," he pleads him almost, his hands reach out to grasp softly at his shirt. "Whatever you want, wherever you want..." Jisung closes his eyes. "This is what it feels like? To be in love? To think about you too much, to think how you are when I can't see you or to want your touch... to want you to be happy? With me?"

There are tears brimming in Jisung's eyes as he speaks.

Minho feels as if he's been ravaged by a flame. He glows so brightly in his hands, his hands shake with his emotion and he reaches for one, his other hand cupping one soft cheek.

Minho has waited for this moment for over a year. He feels as if he's dreaming because he has been pining alone for so long and after a certain point Minho had lost hope that he would notice. But yet here they are, under the stars again.

"Yes," Minho tells him.

"It doesn't hurt to fall but it hurts to land," Minho gets out. His throat feels constricted like he's going to choke on thick smoke. He cradles a growing flame, the same one he once nourished as a tiny flickering ember in the ashes. He had fallen long ago, when he was realising his feelings for Jisung, but for as long as he had known that, each step had hurt. He had landed long ago, and the impact of the fall makes his heart clench, his pulse unmistakably rapid. Each moment of waiting had hurt, wondering if he'd ever have a chance.

He feels like he might cry, too.

“Then,” Jisung croaks it out over a soft sob. “Lee Minho I love you,”

Those are words Minho has dreamed about, fantasised about since he realised his own feelings for the boy in front of him. His blood sings in his veins as he speaks and his skin tingles, his stomach erupting in waves of warmth.

Minho's breathing shudders. He feels like he's soaring in the stars, and in this moment nothing else fills his mind except for his flame burning so brightly in front of him. His mind blanks as he looks at him and this time, he burns right through his own wall of control that has been holding him back for so long.

Minho's grip tightens on his hips suddenly as he pulls him flush to his body, his lips crashing onto Jisung's.

Notes for the Chapter:

AHEM SO

FINALLY!!!!!!!!!!!!

I have been waiting so long but i know u guys have been waiting longer for one of them to finally crack... Minho my utmost respect for you omg and Jisung thank goodness

I have been swamped by work atm so I don't have much free time atm but I'm trying my best! I'm really sorry I couldn't answer to comments least chapter but I've read them all and thank you guys so so so much ☺ I definitely won't be as motivated with this fic without all the support so truly thank you all so much!!

Minho has dreamed about this moment for as long almost as long he's known Jisung. He had wondered how it would be to hold him as close as possible, his body pressed to his and his lips brushing over his plush mouth. Fires would burn deep within him at the mere thought, the imaginary situations that would keep him up at night are nothing compared to what he feels now.

Jisung's body is warm and he moulds against him like a flame curling around its fuel. His fingers are digging into his sides and the sting of pain only reminds Minho that this is real.

Kissing him makes him feel like a drunken god, intoxicated by the taste of ambrosia that is his lips, that is his body impossibly pressing closer to his.

Each breath he sucks him through his nose, Minho feels like it is thick with potent smoke that fills his lungs and instead of choking on it, it soothes him.

His grip on Jisung's hip tightens and their hips bump together. Minho feels a fire roar in his lower belly at the feeling and as his lips move against Jisung's velvety mouth, he pants softly into his mouth just as the younger chokes on a subtle sound in his throat.

Minho's feet move beneath him before he knows what he's doing and almost as soon as he realises what he's doing, Jisung's back is against the sandstone wall of the arch that hangs over the entrance of the garden.

The wall is rough against his lower back that's uncovered by his cropped shirt. The stone scratches his skin and will probably leave it red when he wakes in the morning, but Jisung can't find the will to care. Minho kisses him deeper, his hands slipping up his body, from his clothed hips to the bare skin of his lower abdomen. His hands leave a trail of burning skin in their wake, itching for him to touch him again, press harder.

A soft pant comes from him as they separate for air. Minho stares into

his eyes, burning with certainty and Jisung shivers at the intensity of his gaze. That gaze, hunting and burning with desire is like it has grown tenfold and this time, something akin to excitement and desire burns in the pit of his stomach. His blood pounds in anticipation and he shuffles softly in his place when Minhoo's knee slips his thighs part, his own leg taking up the space between his legs.

Minho doesn't break the stare when Jisung lets out a gentle whimper, instead, he leans closer, his breath fanning over his lips before he connects them again.

Jisung's hands rise from the elder's waist where he had been gripping at him like he was the only thing keeping him up— and maybe he was because his legs feel weak, his nerve ends bursting in flames all over his body.

His kisses aren't like Hyunjin's, quick and hidden. Minhoo's kisses him like he's a starving man and Jisung is a feast of ambrosia fit for gods. His heart leaps in his chest, his pulse out of control all over his body. He grips one of his shoulders, his other hand cupping his jaw as he presses himself further to him, kissing him deeper.

He's a flame consuming him, but he won't ever disappear. Minhoo's stance is strong and sturdy as they pull away once more.

Jisung knows his cheeks are red, the flush reaching the tips of his ears but Minhoo smiles, a soft lifting of lips before he laughs softly.

"So does this mean you also like me?" Jisung whispers quietly and Minhoo's eyes dance with mirth at his words. He tips his head back and laughter flows out of him like the singing of all the gods' muses. Jisung's heart thumps so hard in his chest that he moves along with it, his breathing heavy.

"Only for as long as we met," Minhoo whispers back as he gazes back at him. Jisung stares at him, dumbfounded. His lips are parted as he gapes at him but Minhoo can only smile.

"Then... then why did it take so long for you to..."

Minho cups his cheek and hums softly. "I waited for you," he replies.

“I waited for you to form feelings for me because I didn’t want to confuse you or make you feel pressured to like me... not after everything you had been through,” Jisung’s eyes are gleaming after he finishes talking and after a soft blink from the younger, he lets out a muffled sob that’s stuck in his throat and then he cries, warm tears spilling down his face as he throws himself at Minhø, wrapping his arms tightly around him.

“Thank you,” he cries into his shoulder. “Thank you,” he repeats and Minhø gulps, fighting tears of his own. He holds him close, cupping his hand around his skull as he sobs softly against his shoulder. He feels wetness seep into the material of his first, but Minhø doesn’t mind.

Instead, he closes his eyes, tightens his arm wrapped around his waist and relishes in this moment, his mind still hazy from the intoxication of Han Jisung.

→

Jisung wakes buried in Minhø’s arms, his face pressed against his bare chest.

“Minhø,” he whispers out softly and he watches with amusement when the elder cracks open an eye, his face blooming into a smile. “You have to fix the ship today,” he reminds him and that makes him groan.

“What if I said I just want to lay in bed all day and kiss you?” Jisung’s cheeks burn at his words. His morning voice is croaky and deep with sleep and the low timbre of it makes his spine tingle.

“As much as that sounds great,” he wiggles out of his hold and smiles down at him. Minhø’s never really been able to breathe around Jisung. His effortless beauty leaves him breathless far too much and he just knows he’ll never get used to it, no matter how long he lives.

The golden sunlight highlights his figure, the high points of his nose, the darkness of his hair alit with molten gold in the light. His skin glows bright, healthy unlike their first months together. The eye bags that hung underneath his eyes just a few weeks ago are gone, smoothed out and soft honeyed skin replaces the tiredness that plagued him.

Minho bites down on his lip and tucks his hands underneath his back, willing himself to not touch his soft skin, because the moment he does, he'll be drunk all over again.

"We promised me we'd get home shortly," Jisung finishes and Minho laughs. "That I did," he hums knowingly. "Then," he shuffles out of bed. Jisung's eyes follow him around the room. "I better get ready and go," he turns back and flashes him a bright grin. "Because I promised you,"

Felix's head peaks over his doorframe and Jisung laughs at him and his goofy smile.

"So! How did your night go?" He bounds over to the bed and tackles his best friend into a hug. Jisung groans when he jumps on him, but he cuddles up to him, content. He smells the lingering scent of petrichor from Chan clinging to his shirt and Jisung smiles.

"Did you tell him?" He looks up at him from his chest and Jisung answers with a laugh that turns into a screech as Felix tickles his sides. "Tell me!" He demands, jumping up and down with excitement. "Okay! Okay!" Jisung laughs at his friend and pulls him back down to the bed.

He sits in front of him, hands in his lap and he looks like a small child waiting for their bedtime story. Jisung fights back a laugh but finds him ever so endearing.

"So he came out when I was stargazing... and when we were going inside I realised that I should probably tell him—"

"So you did!" Felix cheers and Jisung nods and his friend slaps his

knee, a smile overtaking his face. "And then what did he say?" His friend's eyes are wide in anticipation and Jisung bites down on his bottom lip as he smiles, his cheeks flushing.

"Then he kissed me," he mutters and Felix screams.

He tackles him again and Jisung shrieks as he shakes his shoulders. "Oh my god, it's about time!" He cries as he collapses onto Jisung's bed. "So," he raises a brow at him. "Was he a good kisser?"

Jisung's flushed cheeks and ears tell Felix that he definitely is and Jisung cries out shortly after at the remembrance of last night. "Really good," he answers and Felix sighs dreamily. "I thought I was going to go insane if you didn't realise soon," Jisung stares at him but decides to not press on. He knows now it was pretty obvious that Minho liked him but maybe his subconscious was scared it wasn't real like Hyunjin?

"So, what happened after that," Jisung groans and covers his flushed face but then he peeks out through his thin fingers, grinning before he whispers the details of their kiss.

→

Minho doesn't come back that night.

He calls them and informs them if he stays later into the night they'd be ready to get going in the early morning. Jisung tells him to be careful and when he walks into his room at night after a long day of helping Mother Barbada with chores, the room is awfully quiet and empty.

He turns on his heels right away and storms into Jeongin's room. The younger is already in his bed, looking cozy and at Jisung's intrusion, he groans. Jisung ignores him and slips into his bed beside him.

"Excuse me?" Jeongin pries an eye open and glares at him but Jisung pouts at the younger sighs, opening his arms, inviting him to cuddle.

“You’re clingy,” he whines but Jisung pokes his ribs. “I’ve developed my own coping mechanisms, thank you very much and cuddles are one of them. I don’t like empty rooms,”

Jeongin sighs softly but then hums. “That’s okay. I miss your hugs, anyways,” Jisung smiles widely and pokes his head up from the younger’s shoulder to press a soft peck on his cheek. Jeongin shrieks.

“Don’t you have a boyfriend now!?” Jisung nods, “Something like that! But you’re so cute, Innie, I love you!” He drawls out the last syllable and Jeongin cries out. “I’ll kick you out and force you to sleep between a couple!”

“Maybe I will go sleep with Felix and Chan,” he says threateningly and Jeongin peers at him. “You wouldn’t?” The younger whispers, half-convinced and he looks saddened.

“Of course not!” Jisung scoffs. “That’s gross how knows what they’re doing at night,” he screws his nose up at the thought.

“No imagination!” Jeongin cries. He closes his eyes tightly and Jisung holds his laughter back. “Don’t say anything else,” Jeongin demands. “Sleep, sleep, sleep or I’ll throw you out of the window!”

“I love you too, Innie,”

“Goodnight!”

→

Mother Barbada cups his cheek with one hand, her other patting Jisung’s arm softly. Her eyes are sad and she tries her best to keep it hidden but it’s fooling no one.

Jisung feels bad that they have to get up and leave so suddenly—even though they all knew once the ship was fixed they’d leave and that they were close to fixing it but Mother Barbada has grown on

them all and they all know she will miss them.

“Stay healthy,” Jisung pats her arm softly as he gently escapes her grip. She smiles and breathes in heavy. “I am as healthy as an ox! I will be fine. Now go, you must save the world, I presume?”

Jisung laughs at her, his eyes crinkling as he smiles. “I guess we do have to do that,”

“Then go,” She whispers. “I will find you all once more after the world is at peace,” Jisung smiles. “I’ll look forward to the day we see you again,” Tears build up in the woman’s eyes and she pats his arms. “Go, my boy. There is much for you all to do,”

He squeezes her hand one last time before turning to Minho. He smiles at him softly and holds out a hand that Jisung takes. “Thank you,” Minho murmurs with a soft smile before they’re walking out of the place they’ve stayed at for the past month.

The ship is right near the gates, moved early in the morning by Minho so it’s easier for them to board.

But when they reach the gate, they’re stopped by a guard and Jisung recognises him as the one that had grabbed him. Minho shifts in front of him just the slightest bit, but Jisung notices his movements. On his left is the youngest royal, Amira standing tall, looking at them all.

“I have come to inform you that the call for a new military is going live today. We will train them hard. We will wait for your call for more information,” she says swiftly. Minho asked them last night to send word to the royals that they were leaving in the morning out of respect. The princess gazes at them before bowing her head gently. Her fingers tug on the pleats of her skirt and she hums softly before she starts to walk off, the guards flanking her.

“Wait!” Felix cries out and appears before her. She stares at him with wide eyes, taking in his uncovered blonde hair and the freckles dancing across his cheeks. “Thank you,” he whispers and she stares at him for a little while before she bows small again before turning to leave. She walks into the crowd, not stopping once.

"It's the thought that counts," Felix sighs as he returns to Chan's side. "I guess you're right," Changbin muses gently.

It's a little odd for them all the finally be back in the ship, but the moment it flies up into the sky, Jisung feels like it is completely normal and that they hadn't just spent a whole month on the ground.

Minho settles by his side as he stares out of the lounge rooms window. The ground below flashes by and Jisung feels a bubble of anxiousness pop in his belly. Minho wraps an arm around his waist, holding him close. "I just," Jisung gulps, his eyes gazing up into Minho's. "The realisation that we'll be back in The Capital soon makes me feel sick," he admits and Minho bites down on his lip before bundling him up in a hug. "I know," he whispers to him, lips brushing over the shell of his ear. "I want this, though," Jisung murmurs. "I really want this so bad... but I know it's so..."

"It's okay," Minho mutters. "We will be strong," he kisses his neck softly. "They won't even know that we're coming,"

"I hope so," Jisung breathes out before he embraces him, pulling him close, his head tucking against his shoulder. Minho holds him tightly. "You're not alone, remember?"

Jisung smiles and hugs him tighter.

As much as Jisung hates to be apart from his daughter and go through so many things in such a short period of time, he knows this moment of his life is something he'll treasure forever.

He's gained a new depth to his and Minho's relationship and his heart flutters in his chest at the remembrance of their first kiss, under the moonlight, wandering hands and the rough surface of sandstone against his back. His skin tingles at the thought and he pulls away from his lover and stares into his eyes before he leans in, kissing him softly.

Minho responds right away, cupping his cheek and kissing him harder. It feels him all breathless, wanting to drown in him but Minho holds him up. Jisung doesn't know why it had taken him so

long to realise his feelings for him.

Even when Eunbyul was born and he stayed with her until he woke, he began to look at him differently, spent more time with him and as time went on his feelings definitely did grow for him. But the fact that Minho waited for him to make that connection means so much to him. He's been trying so hard to sort all his emotions out and how to read other people and Minho knew this and decided to not make it difficult for him and it just makes Jisung fall harder for him.

He rests his forehead against Minho's and breathes in heavily.

Not long ago he had hated the aspect of life. He hated the hollowness and now his heart is so warm and full. He clutches onto Minho's arm and sniffles out. Minho doesn't need to question why he's crying, he just holds him close and lets him get it all out.

→

The beeping noise wakes Jisung from his sleep three nights later. Minho groans as he wakes and tries to bury himself in Jisung's chest but he grows tired of the noise quickly and with a grunt and a few provocatives under his breath, he's stomping to go see what is going on.

Jisung follows after him, not liking how the bed is suddenly cold without him.

The noise leads him to the control panel where Minho is sat, staring at the navigator.

"Damn," he hears him mutter and Jisung hovers over him. "We need to land," Minho tells him and Jisung turns to look at the clock. "It's three in the morning," Jisung mutters and Minho sighs. "If we land now it seems it'll be pretty close to this new settlement... although there are so many trees and it's dark..."

"Turn on the lights?" Jisung points at the button and Minho snorts before he presses it and light suddenly illuminates the earth below.

“Oh,” Jisung whispers.

The trees are thick and there's not one clear patch of land in sight nearby.

“Damn it,” Minhó hisses out and rubs at his temples. He looks up at Jisung and purses his lips. “I have an idea, although not as ideal as landing on land,”

Jisung frowns at him. “Where else can we land?”

“The water,” Minhó points to the large body of water and Jisung gapes. “How?”

“The stand is long... whenever we land the ship isn't pressed on the ground, you know that. If I can get it to extend more than I usually do then we might just be able to land in the lake,”

“Crazy,” Jisung concludes. “Let's do it,”

Minhó laughs at him before he nods. “Now,” he pulls something on the control panel and flies over to the lake, slowly landing until the subtle jarring of touching a hard surface reverberates through the ship.

“We're not in the water, are we?” Jisung murmurs as he leans closer to the window to check. “I think we just made it,” Minhó replies and then yawns. “Can we please go back to bed now?” Jisung chuckles at him before he rushes back to their room, Minhó following close behind.

The morning comes quickly and when Chan storms into their room, ripping the blankets off them as Seungmin is staring at them in disbelief.

“Did we crash again or did you land in the middle of the night?” Seungmin squeaks out and Jisung groans loudly. Minhó sits up slowly and glares at his friends. “I landed,” he tells them quickly, hoping they'd leave so they can sleep for a bit longer although everyone

knows that's not possible now.

"In the middle of a lake?" Chan questions him with a concerned look.

"In the middle of a lake," Minho repeats, monotonously and Chan purses his lips at his best friend.

"Right... so... why exactly?"

Minho begrudgingly gets his ass out of bed and stomps out of the room as he pulls on a shirt. "There's a settlement here. The blasted thing was going off last night and if you haven't noticed by looking out the windows yet, this place is a fucking jungle. Literally." He points to a window where the edges of tall trees loom, reaching high up in the sky. Thick undergrowth covers the ground, making it almost impossible to see in.

"So there was nowhere else to land," Jisung finishes as he settles beside Minho who tucks an arm around his waist, pulling him flush to his body. Chan raises a brow at them but doesn't say anything. Everyone knows about their new relationship status thanks to Felix's loud mouth. They were mostly relieved they didn't have to watch Minho hopelessly pine over him anymore.

"Okay so," Changbin clears his throat and steps forwards. "Do we have a boat on here somewhere or do we have to swim?"

Minho blinks when everyone stares at him.

"Why is everyone looking at me?" He whispers and Felix sighs out heavily. "Because you're the captain of this ship?"

Minho stares back at them all before his shoulders slump and he sighs as well. "We don't have a boat..."

"Damn," Changbin hisses under his breath.

"Alright then," Chan clears his throat and steps forwards. "Give me the bags we need to take,"

"There's only two," Valkyrie informs him as she passes them to him.

They only have drinking water a few other necessities and a caller in case they need Fern or Isa for some reason.

"I'll swim out first, get them to the shore and if anyone needs help, I'll help you cross," he says as he pushes the button next to the doors to open them.

"I hope there aren't crocodiles," he muses but a small gasp from Hyunjin installs a little bit of hesitation in him. "You really don't think..." Felix begins and Chan looks at him, unsure.

"Whats a crocodile...?" Valkyrie whispers, her eyes a little wider than they usually are.

"A monster," Felix replies with an added shiver. Valkyrie takes a step back. "I can't swim," she admits. "Who would want to swim in Scalva? I can't out swim a monster!" Hyunjin grabs her waist and pulls her into a hug, whispering things to her.

"Okay, but if there are crocodiles, what are we supposed to do?" Seungmin asks and Chan turns to him. "Try not to get eaten?" He replies with a frown.

"You know," Jisung pipes up. "I bet there actually is. Not that I even know what they are, but given our luck around water—"

"Really it's your luck," Changbin tells him and he bares his teeth at him. Changbin flinches back and hides behind Minho.

"Well, we can only hope crocodiles don't live in jungles," Chan comments before he jumps into the water below.

"Oh my god," Felix breathes out before he promptly falls on his butt as he watches his boyfriend speed across the water's surface. "Idiot," Jisung hears Minho seethe under his breath.

Chans had a habit of doing potentially dangerous things ever since they met as small children. He's done a lot of things that could easily lead to disaster, but he's gotten out every time. Although it doesn't kill the nerves when he throws himself in danger the next time.

Minho groans out loudly when Chan cheers from the other side,

jumping up and down in triumph. “No crocodiles!” His voice carries over the water and Felix cries out in anguish and if Chan were in reach, he’d be facing the wrath of his fists, Jisung is sure of that.

Jeongin grabs Minho’s arm and drags him to the water. “No, no, no, I don’t trust you!” He sheiks when Jeongin pushes him into the water. Jisung stares at them with a faint grimace. Jeongin grabs him and Minho whines as he helps him swim across.

“Well,” Felix links arms with Jisung. “I won’t let you drown,”

“Fantastic,” Jisung snorts out. “I’ve never swum with you, so I have hopes that this won’t be another near-drowning experience,”

“Put your faith in me!” Felix smiles wide and giggles. “Come on,” he grabs his hand and sits at the door. Jisung follows his movements and they drop off into the water at the same time.

“Does swimming in baths count?” He hears Valkyrie ask, panic laced in her voice as Hyunjin reaches a hand up to her from the water.

Jisung feels for her, honestly. They probably scared her even more with the talk of crocodiles, but if Jisung’s being entirely honest, he has no idea what a crocodile is. All he knows is that it sounds unpleasant and he’ll definitely be okay not meeting one in his life.

Jisung laughs when Minho makes it shore and immediately face plants against the mud, his body going limp. Jeongin kicks his butt and the elder grips his ankle, bringing him down on the slippery mud, too.

Felix helps Jisung when he finds it a little difficult to get through the water, but his grip on him is just enough to keep him afloat all the way to the shore. Minho crawls to Jisung the moment he’s out of the water and slumps against his lap. Jisung pats his cheeks and water drips from the tips of his hair down to Minho’s face. It’s peaceful for the split second they have together before Jeongin pulls Minho back, obviously not done with their play fight.

Jisung turns back to the water and finds Hyunjin trudging through the water up to his waist, carrying Valkyrie who’s clinging to him

tightly, almost sat on his shoulders.

He's not seen the woman look so scared before.

She doesn't let go of him even when they're out of the water until Hyunjin pries her off of him.

"Even after staying at Mydar as long as we did, we never got the luxury of swimming lessons," Minho grumbles and Chan laughs at him. "Maybe you should sign yourself up when Eunbyul learns how to swim," Felix jokes and Jisung laughs but the thought of them doing swimming lessons together makes his heart swell.

Minho mopes and punches Chan's shoulder.

"Let's get moving," Seungmin picks up a bag and Jeongin takes the other.

"Everyone just watch where you're putting your feet. This place is pretty thick," Chan advises when they step into the thicker vegetation.

The air is thick with moisture here and even after walking for what feels like a few hours, Jisung hasn't dried out as much as he thought he would. It's hot here, but different in the way the desert was hot. This heat is worse, like a thick blanket smothering you down with each step, each breath.

His foot catches on a tree root and he crashes down to the ground. Chan helps him back to his feet and Hyunjin quickly gets the first aid kit to clean the cut along his calf that now burns with each step he takes.

"We've been walking for quite some time now," Jeongin pants out and they all agree.

"It's weird," Minho mutters with a frown. "The navigator showed it was close. And that it was big... but there's no hint of anything around here," they take a few more steps and Jisung lags behind, tired and growing annoyed by the way his damp skin sticks together and rubs against his clothing.

“So it should be around here somewhere...” he ends and Jisung peers up at the trees overhead when he hears the breeze rustle the leaves.

Although when he looks up, he doesn't see the leaves bustling in a breeze from the wind, a figure flying along vines hanging from ancient trees. Their ankles are hooked around the vine, a single hand wrapped around its girth as they swing effortlessly through the trees.

He leaves the air leave his lungs when the figures head snaps towards him and a bloody red-painted mask stares right back at him. He stumbles over, alerting his friends just as the figure jumps down from their place in the trees.

They land on their haunches, perched right in front of him.

Jisung feels his heart thump in his chest and he feels like he can't breathe when the light catches the long tip of the blade that's held in their hand.

Although that doesn't present as the only immediate danger.

“Umm guys,” Minho hisses out between his teeth. He's slowly backing away from Jisung and pulls Jeongin behind him when he bumps into him. Jeongin gasps and Jisung turns his head to see the cause of his fear.

“Something tells me we that crocodiles we're the least of our worries,” he finishes off.

Jisung stares in horror at the bright orange coat of the big cat stalking through the bushes, circling them.

It leaps from the bushes, landing on big paws, snarling at them. The masked figure freezes and turns slowly to look at the tiger behind them.

The knife in their hand flies, penetrating the tiger's side.

But the beast only roars, angry. The blade was too short, unable to strike anything vital and all they've done is pissed off the oversized cat.

The pulling of a bowstring creaks through the air and with a whistle, an arrow cuts through the air, piercing between the eyes of the tiger.

Jisung follows the line the arrow took to find Valkyrie in a strong stance, her chin pointed up as the tiger collapses.

“Heh, small cat,” she muses.

Notes for the Chapter:

MINSUNG FINALLY SOME ACTUAL LOAVES OF BREAD NO MORE CRUMBS oh my god

Thank u everyone for the lovely comments last chapter ☺ i love u all!!!

Ive been pretty busy with art atm bc i was getting ready for my art exhibition tomorrow (And oh my god I'm feeling NERVOUS) but since that's all ready I have time to write and reply to comments again!!!

Here's [my twt!](#) If anyone wants to talk hmu!! I really enjoy it and i have no stay friends lol

Also Valkyrie and her last line made me laugh so hard just thinking about her standing over this big cat that she just shot and calling it small. Only Valkyrie.

Have a great week everyone!!!! <3333

Also lol i did totally put the map in before but maybe it didn't work so here it is! The buildings that mark settlements aren't accurate to their descriptions but it was the best i could do!!

Also chapter 40??? Omg this is the longest thing I've ever written :0

“What the hell?” Jeongin mutters out as Valkyrie wanders over to the tiger and takes her arrow back.

“Once I killed a snow lion. They are much bigger than this... orange lion,”

“That’s a tiger,” Minho points at the beast and then releases a shaky breath. “Fuck, I thought we were lunch then,”

“God, if we didn’t have you Valkyrie I think we actually would’ve been lunch,” Felix adds. “Oh my god, I love you!”

While they’re all distracted by the now dead tiger, the masked person slides their attention back to Jisung. They pull another knife from the braided leather belt around their waist and he feels his heart rate pick up in his chest when they move, a bare foot sliding against the damp earth, hair flicking away from their full chest, fear trembles through his body.

The blade in her hand is large, sharp and Jisung finds his eyes flickering from the mask to the blade.

Her hand moves, pulling the blade closer to Jisung.

“Um guys,” Jisung croakily shouts out. His friends all whip around and within milliseconds Chan throws himself to the masked woman while Changbin, the fastest out of all of them helps Jisung up and pulls him to the safety of the rest of the group.

The crowd around each other, protecting each other by grouping together. Chan and the masked woman tumble against the earth. The blade is knocked out of her reach and Chan thrusts his hips up, knocking her off his body when she tries to pin him down with considerable force.

“Shit,” Minho hisses under his breath when Chan dodges a punch as his fingers grip around the edges of the blood-red mask. She growls as Chan pulls it away and with a snap, it comes flying off her face

and with a startled grunt, she lunges for it, tucking it close to their chest once they get out of Chan's grip.

She seethes something in a language none of them understand, but her eyes rake up Chan's frame before spitting in the dirt. She says something else and with a swift movement, heels kicking up wet earth, she has the blade once more in her fist.

"Wow," Chan puts his hands in front of him and he carefully treads around the angry woman, getting in front of his friends.

"What do we do?" Hyunjin hisses underneath his breath and they watch as Chan's muscles tense slightly. His bottom lip is caught between his teeth and with a deep breath through his nose, he mutters out, "I don't know."

All their eyes are on the person holding the broken mask close to her chest.

Her eyes are smudged with charcoal, nose bridge covered with a swipe of red, muddied curly dark locks that's in tangles after Chan's tumble. Brown material is wrapped around her chest, blending into the russet tone of her skin. Her arms are bare, save for a beaded cuff on her bicep and a skirt made of bits of green material and feathers hangs low on her waist.

Jisung peeks behind him and his breathing shudders when a child, no older than ten years old climbs down a tree, dressed in an entirely different way to the woman before them.

His fingers linger on the tree he had descended from, the material of his soft looking yellow t-shirt is dirtied with stains of moss and dirty handprints. He wears linen shorts, also messy with dirt.

The child cocks his head at Jisung, brown eyes narrowing as he takes him in. He takes a step towards Jisung and speaks in the tongue he supposes the woman had. He blinks down at him, unsure how to react.

"I'm sorry," Jisung ends up saying although he feels stupid too. The little boy wouldn't understand a word he would say, everything they

both say to each other lost in translation.

But the boy's face lights up, big brown eyes suddenly shining. "You come from the faraway lands!" He exclaims in awe and Jisung stares down at him in shock. "I've always wanted to speak to someone in this language but no one else except the scientists speak it... That's what I want to do when I grow up! They make the jungle all better! She used to be sick, you know, after the big war!"

The boy rambles on excitedly and he gains attention from everyone else. The woman's eyes widen at the sight of him and she leaps over, snatching him out of Jisung's range of motion.

The boy cries out and the woman yells something else to him, but he scrambles out of her arms, crossing his arms over his chest and coming to stand close to Jisung again.

"Where did this kid come from?" He hears Jeongin mutter and Jisung has to agree with his friend's shock. There's nothing here except for trees and Jisung isn't so convinced that a kid his age could climb such big trees without making a sound. "Down the tree," Jisung mutters quietly.

"She wants to know why you are here," the kid suddenly says, hands on his hips. Jisung looks at the woman who glares at him before he looks back at the boy. "We're here to find a town... something like that,"

The boy relays the message. "She says you aren't needed," he frowns at the woman and says something to her that makes her grit her teeth. "But she's not the boss! The scientists are so we must take you to them! That's the rules! I know the rules because my mum tells me them all the time, like how I'm not supposed to come down by myself to the jungle, but I do that all the time because I want to see a tiger!"

"I don't think you do, kid," Jeongin shakes his head at the little boy who pouts. How he hasn't seen the bright orange coat of the tiger near a bush a few meters away, Jisung doesn't know.

The woman hisses something and with a pout, the boy puts his hand in hers. "You have to follow us, okay?" He raises his brows at them

and Jisung finds himself nodding along. He's having a bit of trouble processing everything that has just happened but he has to move quickly once the woman takes off, pulling at something in the tree the boy had come from. Minho mutters in awe when a buzz sounds out and the woman removes her hand from the tree and with another beeping sound, a metal ladder slowly reaches down to the earth below.

"Did she just scan her hand on the tree...?" Valkyrie mutters and Minho nods his head. Jisung stares at the ladder and the boy chirps happily and as soon as his feet are on the steps, the ladder moves, escalating him upwards. The woman doesn't follow, instead, she glares at them until Changbin steps up to climb the ladder.

"I don't like heights," Minho then murmurs under his breath but Jisung has also stilled beside him.

"You literally have been flying a ship for months, Minho," Seungmin points out but Minho turns to him with a deep frown. "That's different and you know it," he points accusingly at him and Seungmin rolls his eyes at him. "That's high," Jisung mutters from beside Chan. The eldest of their group grabs his hand and leads him to the ladder.

"I'll be right behind you, I won't go anywhere," He tells him and hesitantly Jisung grips the ladder only to squeeze his eyes tightly when he feels the whirring of electricity underneath his palms, but before he knows it sunlight is nipping at his cold nose and he opens his eyes to find a sparkling city above the treetops.

People hurry over bridges suspended from tree to tree, onto wide platforms that connect to other bridges, to other buildings seemingly held up by nothing else but the thick canopy of trees.

The little boy beams as his feet bounce up and down on the white platform they're standing on. Jisung feels a little lightheaded at the city sitting in the sky. Chan is by his side, a hand settling on his hip when he takes a step backwards.

"Welcome to Rahka!" The boy cheers and Jisung hears Chan gasp in awe when his eyes leave Jisung's face. The city stretches on further

than the eye can see and Jisung wonders how they had missed something so big even in the dark of the night. Minho clutches onto Chan when he gets onto the platform as well and Jisung reaches blindly for his hand.

There's a large glass dome looming on the horizon and the boy points to it.

"That's where the scientists are," he tells them. "So that's where we need to go, too!" He chirps happily and as soon as the woman joins the rest of them on the platform, he runs off, across a bridge wide enough for six rows of people to comfortably cross at once. The rails are made out of braided steel and when they step on the bridge, trying to keep up with the boy, Jisung yelps when Minho squeezes his hand painfully.

"Shit, sorry," Minho ushers out but Jisung shakes his head at him. "It's okay," Jisung rubs his thumb over Minho's knuckles and with a shaky breath, they hurry over the bridge together.

Jisung finally feels like he's drying out up here with the soft breeze and the strong sunlight.

Rahka is big, stretching in every direction his eye takes. Jisung once wondered how Mydar was built. How such a large structure had been built and stands so strong, but Jisung's curiosity of how Rahka has been built exceeds his interest of Mydar's construction. It seems like it's just floating over the treetops, shining and looking down at the jungle down below.

Jisung peeks over the edge of the bridge, his inquisitive nature wanting to know just how high up they are and when he does, his stomach drops. The ground is far from them and Jisung knows they would've looked like mere ants scurrying against the earth from up here. He quickly tears his eyes away and clutches tighter on Minho's hand.

"What's wrong?" Minho whispers in his ear but Jisung shakes his head quickly, knowing his lover isn't fond of heights either. "Nothing!" He hurries out but Minho raises a brow at him. Jisung tears his eyes away from his prying gaze.

“The kid says there are scientists here,” Hyunjin says from beside Jisung. Valkyrie is toddling up ahead with Jeongin who are both getting too close to the edge for comfort. Hyunjin hisses under his breath when Valkyrie holds onto the railings and peers down below, a wide smile on her face.

“What are you thinking?” Minho asks him and the doctor purses his lips before shrugging. “Hoping they study diseases,” he mutters under his breath and they look at him with small frowns.

“You can’t be thinking—“

“Just think about it for a bit,” Hyunjin tells them. “If we go back and fight just like this how many people would we lose because of it? Too many,” his eyes land on his wife, vibrant with life as she fools around with Jeongin. Jisung gulps.

He knows Hyunjin’s worry. He won’t be able to risk his wife, not any of the other women that will fight with them and although Jisung hadn’t thought of trying to find a cure or a prevention measure, it would aid in many ways.

“Then I hope they’ll be friendly enough to accept our requests,” Jisung says and Hyunjin stares down at him for a little bit before he nods.

The people walking around Rahka barely bat an eyelid at them passing. Some gaze over them before smiling softly and Jisung looks between his friends in confusion. They’ve not had such a welcome experience yet. Minus the confrontation with the woman trailing behind them, her face still as if it was carved stone.

He recalls one of the merchants mentioning travelling to lands beyond the sand, in the jungles so maybe Rahka is used to visitors? Jisung isn’t sure but the way how they just seem to not notice them is much different to other places they’ve been before. Even in Scalva, arriving with the leader’s daughter they had brought attention to themselves because of their clear differences in clothing and appearance.

When they’re closer to the glass dome, the platforms shift lower so

they're in the canopy of the trees. The glass dome is hidden beneath all the leaves but as they near the dome, the woman scans her hand against a metal gate that creaks open. They walk down the stairs that lead to the dome and Jisung watches the movement inside and his feet still.

People dressed in long white coats are shuffling around, table to table with things in their hands focused on their work.

But Jisung's heart thumps loudly in his chest and his hand holding onto Minho becomes slick with sweat until it slips from his grasp.

Flashes of white coats, peering eyes and cold hands pressing against his bare skin. With a small cry, red overtakes his vision, the starkness of blood against his bedsheets.

Minho turns to him, tries to reach out a hand to grab him as he takes steps backwards, but he takes another big step backwards, crashing into someone behind him. His body tenses and the larger person steps to the side, suddenly in his line of vision.

Jisung's heart stops for a second when a middle-aged man in a white coat is standing in front of him, saying something to him but Jisung cannot hear him. His heartbeat is deafening in his ears, his vision swirling. His body is screaming that he's in danger and his mind catches up quickly and the man's kind face blurs into the picture of a doctor that had done so much to him.

He lets out a shaky breath and if he wasn't so far gone into his panic, he'd see all his friends turning back and the fear in their eyes at the sight of him so far gone.

His back presses against the braided metal railing and the man in the white coat nears him. Step by step fear builds up inside him. And with each step, his feet shuffle up the wall of the railing, lifting himself higher until he reaches his limit and with a startled cry just as he pushes himself too far against the railing, Minho tackles the man in the white coat, saying something to Jisung, his eyes wide as he feels his weight topple.

Just before his hips fall over the railing and the rest of his body

follows, a hand is forcibly hitting him between the shoulder blades, hitting him with such force that he flies forwards, landing at Minho's feet.

And like that, the panic leaves him and it's like the world comes back to him. His heart is still beating wildly and he whips his head around to find the woman from before swinging on a vine, staring back at him with wide eyes.

He's suddenly pressed against Minho's chest, the elder breathing heavily as he squeezes him tight.

"God, Jisung!" Felix cries as he flops down next to him. "I thought you were going to fall!"

The man in the white coat is gone when he looks over Minho's shoulder. Felix strokes his cheek gently and hands gently wrap around his waist, hauling him back to his feet. Chan is standing behind him, hands still on his waist as Jisung takes a few deep breaths. Hyunjin helps Minho back to his feet and Jisung reaches out for him when he notices the tremor shaking throughout his body.

"I'm sorry," he cries out softly. "I don't... I don't know what happened," he mutters and Jeongin shakes his head at him. "It wasn't your fault... just... stay away from the railings from now on," he tells him and Jisung nods his head. He won't dare to go near the edge anymore.

The little boy is nowhere to be seen, but Jisung is glad he hadn't been around to see what had just happened.

Feet thump against the platform out the front of the dome and Jisung turns to see the woman, standing from her landing.

"Thank you," he whispers to her and she gazes at him with a softer look in her eyes. She grunts something to him and with that, she saunters forwards to the doors to the dome, her hand against the glass doors and with a flash of blue light, tessellating patterns appearing against the glass, the doors unlock with a soft click.

She turns to them as she holds the doors open but then turns her gaze

to Jisung and shakes her head at him. His lips part, resistance on his tongue but Valkyrie takes a step backwards from Hyunjin's side, slipping her smaller hand into his.

"I'll stay with you," she tells him and Minho goes to say something but Felix smiles softly and ushers him inside. His eyes linger on Jisung but he finally tears his gaze away once the scientists' attention is on them.

"Why did you stay with me instead of going in?" Jisung asks the younger woman who's plonked herself down on the platform, her legs tucked to her chest. "Truthfully," she laughs softly and Jisung joins her on the floor. "I find all the... technology a little overwhelming still," she turns to him and smiles.

"I grew up with the only light source the sun and fire... the only heat fire and it was all very sudden, you know to come from snowy plains and mountains to places like this," she gestures to the place around them and Jisung feels a pang in his heart for her.

"Do you miss it? Scalva?"

She hums softly. "I do miss it, I suppose. I miss my father more than anything, though," her eyes flicker to her hands and she reaches up, tugging softly at the ring at her lip.

"Did that hurt?" He finds himself asking and she perks up a bit. "Yeah," she admits, but then she smiles. "We don't have things like numbing agents that work as well as the ones Hyunjin uses. It hurt for a while, but I was quite excited to get it... you know the signification that I entered womanhood. I will gain another once I have my first child," she tells him and Jisung smiles softly at her.

"I miss Eunbyul," he sighs out. He tries to remember the lines of her smile and warmth fills him when the sounds of her giggles echo in his memory. "You will be back to her soon," Valkyrie clutches his hand and squeezes it.

The air is cool in the dome. It's cold enough for Minhø's skin to prick up at the sudden temperature change.

The woman walks ahead, through rows of tables and the people occupying them give her a nod as a greeting which she gives back. They follow her like lost ducklings through the lab and to his surprise, even the scientists don't seem to mind their presence.

"Where are you taking us?" Hyunjin asks her but she doesn't spare him a look. She just grunts and points ahead where a set of doors are. She scans her hand once more and Minhø can't help but wonder why she looks so different to the others around her. She looks as if she's come from the earth herself, one with the wind and the dirt whereas everyone else they've come across in Rahka so far have been neat, dressed in similar clothing to their own. But she fits into this place, stands out but everyone they've passed obviously has respect for her.

They step into a room with white walls and the brightness of it all momentarily blinds Minhø. He feels Jeongin stiffen slightly beside him and he reaches out to pat his back softly.

The brightness of the place is uncanny. Just like the halls and rooms that they had broken into a year ago. Minhø is glad Jisung hadn't come in with them.

"It looks so much like it," he hears Seungmin grit out and Minhø agrees with him.

A man notices them and he looks up from a microscope he was looking into and smiles softly.

"Ah," he stretches his arms out. "I did not expect to have visitors today," he says and then says something to the woman who has a lengthy response to what he had said.

His dark eyes gaze over them all as she still talks, pointing to Chan, then to Hyunjin and to the way outside where Jisung and Valkyrie

are sitting together.

“You are not from this continent,” he concludes, turning back to them. Chan nods softly and goes to say something but the man tugs his hands into the pockets of his white lab coat and speaks, “There is a reason you are here. We got an alert from the City of Sivra a few days ago, speaking of a small group spreading the word about a force building up. I suppose that is you,”

Minho knew that the City of Sivra had connections with other settlements, unlike the others that followed the rules that the Capital first enforced hundreds of years ago.

Chan clears his throat and nods. “That would be us... unless there's another group sneaking around us,” Chan’s attempt of a joke makes the man in front of them chuckle softly.

“I have heard the details from Queen Malti,” he tells them and smiles. “Rahka will join, of course, we have things that would greatly improve the army you are creating,”

“Just like that?” Hyunjin asks and the man shrugs. “Life may be peaceful here, but if that is going to be challenged soon and we now know about it, what do we have to lose?” If Jisung were here he would’ve said something that the man might’ve paused at, thought deeply about but the comment doesn’t come even though he expects it.

“I am Rava,” he finally introduces himself and he gives them a soft bow of his head. Chan introduces them all, even that Jisung and Valkyrie are waiting outside. Rava is intrigued as to why they haven’t come in but Hyunjin speaks before he can question their absence, although Minho is sure the woman will let him in on Jisung’s episode just before.

“Then... what can you contribute to us?” Hyunjin questions and Rava nods at his question, his dark curls bouncing with his movement. “We are home to a lot of experienced scientists,” he gestures around with his hands, “obviously,” he adds on. “We also have a large crew working on technology and transportation systems, like our own ships.”

Minho frowns at that. If they make ships, help had been much closer to them than they originally thought and he doesn't see why they've come out here if the City of Sivra had let them know everything.

"What... what does your team of scientists specifically study?" Hyunjin pries a little further and Minho's lips part in realisation. Hyunjin's last words ring around in his head.

"We have many teams," Rava answers him. "Geological, biologists, botanical experts, medicine—"

Hyunjin cuts him off. "What experience does your medical team have with diseases and their prevention?" Rava frowns at him, obviously finding a link in what Hyunjin is asking.

"They are skilled," he answers swiftly. "Whatever you are getting at, however, will have to be spoken about another day. They are busy giving out the vaccines to the jungle fever,"

"What's that?" Felix asks quietly and Rava's eyes turn to him. "Some mosquitos carry a disease that makes people ill. It causes fever and vomiting," he tells them and Jeongin and Changbin share a worried look. "It's very rare these days, however," Rava adds after seeing their apprehension.

"Well, then," Rava pats his sides. "I imagine you will be staying with us for some time? There's a guest wing on the western end near the waterfalls. Noa will show you the way," he speaks to the woman—Noa, which they now know her as.

Noa turns to them, her dark eyes staring at them. She says something and Rava laughs softly. "She has to go. Follow her now, our lovely Noa doesn't like to wait around for people,"

Noa spits something back at him but Rava rolls his eyes at her.

They hurry after her, speeding through the lab until they are back outside. The change of temperature is unpleasant. Minho had grown used to the cool air in the lab, and outside is much hotter. Although his discomfort seems to melt away when he sees Jisung, standing underneath the sun's kiss.

“Did it go well?” He asks quickly and Minho reaches out, his fingertips dancing over the skin above his hand. “It did,” he confirms and Jisung sighs out a deep breath of relief. “I was beginning to worry,” he admits. “I thought maybe we’d be rejected because of how... the power dynamics are here,” he points to the dome. Minho knows what he means. He’s never heard of a place run by scientists other than the institution back in the Capital and that is a whirlwind of lies, deception and corruption.

“It went well, mostly because Queen Malti sent them notice of us as we left. They know all about the Capital, I’m assuming by the way he talked... I think we’ll have a good chance with these guys,” he unknowingly pulls Jisung away from the edge after they round a corner. Jisung clutches onto his arm, thin fingers wrapping around his wrist.

“They say they have ships,” Minho sighs out and Jisung looks at him with wide eyes. “All this time?”

Minho shrugs. “I don’t know. It seems they don’t go to other settlements just for the hell of it... even though they’ve agreed really quickly,”

“They’ve had a few days to process it, I guess. And hey, look at it, Odin agreed quickly as well,” Jisung points out and Minho hums in agreement. “Maybe because of Valkyrie, but he agreed anyway,” Jisung chuckles softly.

They turn another corner, following Kilna storming through the paths, her face still emotionless.

A blur of blue suddenly flies by and Jisung who’s looking at Minho, gazing over the lines of his jaw and the soft pads of his lips, loses his footing when the child barges into him. She lands on her butt in front of him, a small whimper escaping her as she hits the ground beneath their feet. Jisung doesn’t fall, thanks to Minho’s grip on him.

“Oh god, are you okay?” He bends down, gently peering into the little girl’s eyes. Her eyes narrow slightly as she looks at him but she takes the hand Jisung offers to her. Her doe eyes blink up at him, honey eyes shining and her mouth parting softly. Jisung sees an odd

resemblance between her and his daughter, the same shaped mouth and full cheeks.

She runs off again quickly after muttering a soft thank you in their language, not a hint of an accent in her voice at all.

“I hope I didn’t hurt her,” Jisung whispers and Minho pats his back and Felix reaches to pull on his hand, tugging him down the unoccupied bridge that leads to several houses arranged in a half-circle. The houses are three stories each, made of sparkling white stone and vines twisting over the surface of the buildings. He can hear the soft roar of waterfalls nearby.

Noa turns to them and gestures to the houses and says something before grabbing something from her pocket and pressing it to the gate that is between them and the houses. It opens and with that she walks away, only sparing a glance to Jisung as they walk in.

“I guess we pick a house?” Felix says. “I thought we would’ve needed keys?” Changbin murmurs and Jeongin mutters in agreement. “Or maybe her hand scanning thingy unlocked them?” Felix suggests.

“We can only try,” Jisung says and Valkyrie hums. “I’m taking the middle house, come on,” she pulls Hyunjin along who almost trips over his own feet trying to follow her. Chan and Minho laugh at him and he retaliates by flipping them off as his wife pulls him, a bounce in her step.

Jisung shrugs and he pulls Minho along with him to the house on the far right where it only looks out at trees, not another view of Rahka.

The doors erupt with the same blue light the lab doors did and Minho stares at it in awe. A voice asks for a password and Jisung is startled by it and Minho laughs at him before writing in Eunbyul’s birthday 1303.

Jisung recognises the set of numbers and a smiles blooms across his face. “You remember her birthday,” he whispers softly just as the doors crack open. Minho chuckles and his hands land on his waist before he hoists him up, picking him up over the threshold. Jisung laughs as he’s lifted and his hands grip onto Minho’s broad shoulders.

“How could I not?”

Just as Jisung goes to shut the door behind them so they can explore the comfort of their own houses, Jeongin pokes his head in, pouting.

“I am not living by myself. And by the way, there's someone else in the house next to Chan and Felix across from you guys.”

“Well,” Minho tuts at the youngest man. “You are not coming in with us,”

Jeongin scoffs. “That’s rude!”

“We are a new couple,” Minho hisses out and Jisung watches with amusement as Jeongin takes himself out without another thought. “I’ll go ruin Changbin’s life!” He yells out as he leaves.

“What an idiot,” Jisung laughs and Minho agrees with a chuckle. He goes to shut the door again and just before it clicks, a force stops him from doing that.

“Jeongin, go away!” Jisung yells as he tries to fight the door closed but with a forceful yank, the door handle is torn out of his grasp and is thrown open to reveal someone that has Jisung’s stomach rolling before pure, white-hot anger flares throughout him.

His eyes are wide in disbelief as he heaves in deep breaths of air.

Jisung feels as if he’s breathing in pure fire. His anger shoots higher and higher at the sigh of his face.

“Jisung?” He pants out and he wants nothing more than to scream and throw him to the ground. But to this day, he still stands taller than him, larger than he is.

“Han Jisung?” He asks again and Jisung takes a step backwards, his back pressing against Minho’s chest.

“Who are you?” Minho growls out, protectively putting a hand on Jisung’s hip. The man's eyes follow his hand and Minho grits his teeth.

The man stares at them, eyes flickering between Jisung's face and Minho's hand on his hip.

"I'm," he gulps, his voice suddenly faltering. "I'm Han Youngho," he replies and fear shoots up Minho's veins.

"He's my son," he points to Jisung. "I'm his father,"

Notes for the Chapter:

DAMN

HYUNJIN IS BACK TOO OMG i missed him so much
:DDDDD

Anyways I almost forgot to update bc i was marathoning movies with my family today lol. Sydney has gone into lockdown for two weeks so that's fun lol. I dont really mind tho bc it gives me time to work on all of my current projects (writing and non writing related things)

ANYways in rambling again whoops

Jisung's dad.... And unsuspected problem

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“Get out of my sight,” Jisung growls out between gritted teeth. The poison in his tone is akin to that of how he spoke in the first days after the breakout. The clear hostility and anger that burnt through his body is suffocating and Minho’s grip on his hip falters.

Youngho— Jisung’s father, the man that had carried him all the way to meet his life’s end, sold for nothing more than a bag of money stands before them. How he has the audacity to even breathe in Jisung’s direction is baffling to Minho.

He had done more than betrayed his son.

Minho knows Jisung.

He knows him well enough to know he will never forgive him for what he did to him. And Minho counts down the seconds for Jisung’s next move.

It’s like a ticking bomb, waiting for the bang to go off after igniting it. Tick. Tick. Tick

Jisung pounces mere moments later, his body although smaller in comparison to the man that fathered him, knocks the man off his feet and he digs his fingers into the skin by his collarbone as he grips at the collar of his shirt. Youngho screeches in surprise and Minho is frozen for a few seconds, watching Jisung scream at him, pound at his chest until he goes to throw him off in self-defence.

Jisung rolls to his side and kicks his legs before spinning to his feet, looming over his father’s fallen figure.

Valkyrie zooms over, having seen the commotion and stalks around the man, watching carefully even though she doesn’t know the cause of Jisung’s anger towards him. Their friends pour out of the safety of their new shelter and hurry over.

Minho finally springs to action when Jisung lands a punch, splitting his father’s lip. Blood dribbles down his chin and he stares at him

with a betrayed look. Minho fumes at him, wanting to knock him off his feet as well at the mere look he gives Jisung.

Minho wraps his arms around Jisung's waist, hugging him to his chest tightly even as he screams and kicks, tries to claw at his hands that press against his abdomen.

He's seen him mad before. Minho's seen him raging at the world, quiet anger raging in his eyes, burning like fires destroying a city. He's seen him lunge, leap for Hyunjin that first day. The pure panic that followed that incident. But now, his guttural screams and his fingers that press painfully against his skin prove that the anger Minho has seen before is nothing compared to the eight years of pent up anger that has been wallowing inside of him.

Jisung rages boldly, like wildfires capturing a mountainside. Unforgiving.

Minho hugs him tighter and Chan grabs the man by his collar and pulls him to his feet. Felix and Seungmin usher towards the door behind Jisung and motion for Minho to bring him in.

The others stand around Youngho, all posed in protective stances. They're all ready to pounce at him like Jisung had but they hold themselves back.

Had this happened in Mydar or out in the wild, not in a settlement like Rahka, everyone would've been on him. But they can't do such reckless and emotional driven things here. Not now, not ever probably.

Seungmin slams the door behind them and Minho releases Jisung from his grasp and his heart sinks like a rock failed to skim over a river as he collapses to the ground, legs failing beneath him.

A sharp intake of breath is heard before he cries. He tucks his head between his knees and Minho's memory flashes to that cold, rainy night in the cave where he had cried just like this.

He's sobbing words that are unintelligible and he struggles to breathe. Felix takes him into his arms, rubbing a soothing hand over

his back as his best friend sobs uncontrollably. Minho feels as if he's frozen, torn between wanting to comfort his hurting lover or ripping his fathers head off.

That girl, the small child that had bumped into Jisung minutes before, the familiarity of her face suddenly sparks a pit of dread in Minho's stomach. He knows Jisung knows too. His figure racks with sobs choked words escaping his mouth as he tries to talk.

Minho heaves in a deep breath before he gets on his knees and gently places his hands on Jisung's knees, prying them apart so he can slot his body between his legs, pulling him to his chest, trying to comfort him.

Jisung had only spoken of his sister a few times. Brief and never in much detail but Minho knows that once his mother fell pregnant with her, he began to feel distant from his parents in a way he never felt before. The little girl he spoke to so softly mere minutes ago, he had lost everything to her.

Minho's heart sits heavy in his chest and he squeezes Jisung harder until he finally feels hands grip at his waist, a wet nose against the bare skin of his neck. Minho doesn't mind.

They stay like that for a while, Felix and Seungmin off to the side as Jisung quiets in Minho's arms before he slumps against him, quiet. Minho thinks he's sleeping like he typically does after exerting too much emotion in one big blast, but the soft sniffles and his fingers gripping for purchase at his hips tells him otherwise.

"There are bedrooms upstairs," Seungmin tells him gently, his eyes hold a glint of sadness in them. Minho gives him a soft smile before he hauls himself to his feet, then getting Jisung in his arms, helping him find his balance.

"This isn't fair," Jisung mutters quietly when he walks him to the room Seungmin and Felix lead them to.

"It isn't," Felix agrees and reaches out for his friend's hand, giving it a squeeze. "I'm so sorry, Sungie," he whispers out, letting his grip fall on his hand. Jisung cradles his hand to his chest, his features knotting

together before he lets out a soft sob.

It rips through Minho's heart like the way paper tears— ragged and sharp.

The room is large, a big bed against a grey wall, a bathroom attached to it like their residence back in Mydar. One wall is made of glass that overlooks the scenery outside, green trees and vines and the peek of white water in the distance—the source of the soft rushing noise of water they heard before.

Jisung curls up on top of the bed, into a little ball. It's the same way he slept when they were out in the wilderness, when he was distant and when he didn't know how to interact with them. Felix lingers in the doorway after Seungmin sees himself out quietly.

His eyes are glued on his friend who gently reaches for the blanket at the foot of the bed and tucks it under his chin. Jisung stares out at the window, silent tears running down his face.

"I'll come back later with food and water," Felix whispers softly before he takes a step backwards. "Please take care of him," he whispers to Minho, clutching one of his hands with both of his smaller hands.

"I will," Minho replies with a soft smile. Felix nods gently before he turns and leaves.

Minho just gazes at him for a few seconds before his feet move, taking him to the bed. He climbs up, kicking his shoes off his feet once his knees are on the soft mattress and slowly and carefully he slides behind Jisung, a hand snaking around his waist, settling on his stomach.

"I'm here," he tells him gently and Jisung buries his head into the mattress below.

"I've never felt so betrayed," he whispers quietly. "I've never wanted to see blood so bad before," his body shakes with a sob. Minho holds him tighter. "I almost lost myself," he whimpers and the sound kills something inside Minho.

He doesn't know how to soften his pain. He's had ideas before when Jisung has hurt, but he's not sure how Jisung is meant to just suddenly be okay in a few hours. His father is here. So close to something that created so much pain in his heart.

"I was so cold," He whispers. "When I first entered. My body ached so much... countless needles, so much pain," Minhø gulps, his eyes watering. His lungs feel heavy with each breath as Jisung continues talking.

"I sat in the dark every day for seven years. Some days the pain was almost unbearable and..." his voice cracks suddenly. "And one day the pain was unbearable..." there's a pause in the air.

"You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to," Minhø croaks out gently. He wants him to know that. He needs him to understand that, but Minhø also gets that maybe this is a way of him coping.

"I know that," Jisung responds quietly. "I want to tell you... although I don't know if I could say it if I was looking at you," Minhø responds by patting his stomach softly. Jisung heaves in a deep breath.

"The first years were doctor visits upon doctor visits. The next couple of years was hormone treatments, they changed me... so much... and the pain I felt then I thought was the worst of it all," a chilling laugh escapes him. "I was so wrong," he mutters out. Minhø fears what Jisung is going to reveal to him, not because he's scared of the things Jisung has gone through, but because it hurts him. So clearly and still so much, these things Jisung carries around with him are heavy.

"I was seventeen." He says and Minhø's heart sinks.

"I first fell pregnant at seventeen," he mutters out and Minhø feels a single tear finally slide down his face.

"I thought I knew pain when I was going through the cycles, pain from growing an organ I shouldn't have ever grown. I was so lonely in there, so alone. I was so afraid," Minhø lets his tears fall quietly. Jisung lets out sobs through his words.

"Until I thought I had someone... even if all it was..." he breathes in

heavily. "Was just a fluttering heart inside me? I grew to... somewhat accept it, something inside me longed for it but then it was all ripped away from me... and I had to watch it go... feel it go," he breaks out into loud sobs and Minho tightens his arms around him tighter, tugging him closer.

Things Minho had been confused about in the past about Jisung. When he sobbed after he felt the movement of Eunbyul inside him the first time, crying that they're alive, they're alive. Goosebumps form over his skin. His hesitation about the knowledge of his pregnancy wasn't just his inner hatred of his ability, but he was scared that he'd lose his baby again.

Minho stares out at the trees past Jisung's exhausted frame and he wonders just how cruel life is. Unforgiving.

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Jisung stares out of the window, his hand pressed to the cool glass.

His knuckles ache from punching his father's face but he ignores it. He had never thought he'd ever have to see his face again. Not after he walked away as he screamed for him, not as he yearned for his fathers once safe arms. Jisung has lived eight years burying his hatred for his biological parents.

He didn't want to even think about it. After becoming a parent himself though, his hatred had only grown into a festering wound of pure fury.

Someone settles next to him and Jisung tilts his head to find Hyunjin standing by him.

"I'm sorry it had to be the way it was," he starts and Jisung just shrugs. There isn't much they can do about it.

"I know we had very different circumstances with our parents," Hyunjin mutters and Jisung sighs, nodding his head.

"My parents ignored me most of my life... they only wanted me to

study, to eventually take over my father's position once he had to retire..." Jisung stares up at him and grasps his hand, squeezing it gently. Hyunjin squeezes it back. "I only wanted love... so I studied hard, got good marks, got my medical license younger than anyone else... I didn't get love even after all of that. It was hollow. A masked play that I stupidly fell for,"

"I thought my parents loved me," Jisung laughs hollowly. "I really believed that," His eyes turn sad, reflecting the look in Hyunjin's eyes. "Up until my mother fell pregnant. Did they deem me not worthy of their love? Or was I a sacrifice for my baby sister to live?" His eyes fall to the scenery out the window. "It's so messed up, Hyunjin,"

"I know," he croaks out.

They turn when footsteps sound out. Chan is standing in the doorway to the bedroom, a sad smile playing on his lips. "Hi," he whispers, walking forwards. Jisung collapses in his arms, breathing in the heady scent of petrichor that is endlessly comforting to him. Chan is comfort, even after all these months.

His arms are strong around him and Jisung falls into his embrace, feeling like the scared and frail boy he had been a whole year ago. "Feeling better?"

"I guess so," Jisung replies as he pulls away, his fingers fiddling with the hem of his shirt. "It won't be easy coming to terms with it... but what else can I do?" Chan gives him a soft smile.

"Rava has asked to meet. Valkyrie came running with Noa after her, I'm not quite sure what's going on there," Hyunjin zooms out at that and Jisung follows hot on his tail, Chan right behind him.

Valkyrie is gripping at Noa's hand that's pulling both ends of her braids while Noa's hand is rubbing up and down her arm where her tattoos litter her skin.

"They're tattoos! Tattoos!" She cries. "Oh my god, I'll kill her!" She spits out when she sees everyone running out.

“Hey!” Hyunjin slaps Noa’s hand away and pulls Valkyrie away. Noa hisses something under her breath and suddenly Rava is behind her, staring oddly at her.

“What are they?” He points to Valkyrie’s arm and the woman groans. “Tattoos,” She grits out. “They tell the meaning of my name and spirit,” she continues and Rava tells Noa something which makes her take a single step backwards, away from Valkyrie.

“It’s not every day we see someone with... runes along their skin,”

“They’re not runes,” Valkyrie hisses out and Hyunjin grips her hand, squeezing it tightly.

Jisung sighs and wanders over with the rest of his friends to Rava.

“Oh, good everyone is here,” He clears his throat as he looks at Jisung. “Greetings,” he gives him a small wave and Jisung stiffens at the awkwardness of it all and forces a smile on his lips. “Hi,” he waves back and then falls quiet.

Rava talks for a few minutes, asking them how their night was and how they like it in Rahka before he leads them away to where a council team is waiting for them.

The matter of their involvement in the revolutionary movement is to be discussed. Fern and Isa are to join them in this meeting over the caller, too.

They walk across bridges and platforms back into the bustling life that Rahka nourishes above the treetops. “So where exactly are we going?” Valkyrie asks Rava who laughs. “You are a rather curious woman,” he concludes with a small furrow in his brow, but his voice is playful. “Past the scientist dome,” he says. “There’s a small tower where we hold council meetings to make big decisions when the time comes,”

He points to a white stone tower glistening in the sunlight around a hundred meters away. Vines have grown over the sides of it, flowers blooming and bees dancing from bloom to bloom.

Jisung pauses at the second last bridge when he spots a face in the

crowd. Everyone crosses without him, even Minho doesn't notice he's not following until they're across the last bridge, on the platform where the tower is built onto.

He locks eyes with him and smiles softly and nods his head once, telling him that it's okay. He's okay. Minho nods back and turns to go into the building, giving him space.

His heart is thumping hard in his chest when he turns. He breathes out heavily, trying to calm the rising wave of anxiety bubbling up his throat.

Jisung doesn't remember her name.

He was old enough when she was born to remember it, but his repressed memories of the days before his parent's betrayal had faded, too painful for him to carry around.

Her dark hair is pulled into a ponytail at the base of her skull, a worn pair of denim overalls hangs off her frame, a stained white shirt underneath. She stares back up at him, her lips parted as she breathes out little puffs of air. Her brows furrow looking at him.

She takes a step towards him, her hand curling around the metal railing as she does.

Jisung feels stupid that he's so nervous in front of a child that doesn't even remember him. She was just a baby the last time he saw her.

Some part of him hated her so much. While in the intuition he felt nothing but hurt and fury towards her. He knows it wasn't her fault and she's innocent in the mess he had been involved in, but he always thought if she hadn't been born, he wouldn't have had to face all the pain he did.

His fist clutches at the hem of his black shirt, nervous to finally be looking down at her.

"Are you my brother?" She speaks, her voice clear and Jisung's heart jumps in his chest. He stares down at her, blinking a few times, trying to find the courage to speak to her.

Eventually, he manages a nod.

She frowns slightly, her hand falling from the railing. "I missed you," she says softly before she runs at him, arms wrapping around his middle. Jisung freezes in shock. His hands hover around her back before they settle gently against her body, holding her gently. She squeezes him harder.

She's taller than what he was at her age, but he had lived in the deep slums, malnourished and stunted in growth because of that. She looks healthy, full in her face, bright whereas his reflection in the water showed a thin, bony boy staring back at him.

He's not sure how she missed him. She wouldn't have even known he existed if it wasn't for someone telling her about him. He grits his teeth at the thought of his parents telling her about her brother. What would've they said about him? That he went willingly to help their family or that he had run away? Whatever they had said, Jisung doubts it had been the truth.

Because it was ugly. It's despicable and no child could look at their parents the same if they knew the truth.

She lets go of him and takes a single step backwards. "Will you stay?" She asks, brown eyes sparkling as she looks up at him. "Will you?" Jisung's mouth goes dry. His mind flickers back to Eunbyul and the sight of her screaming face, tears rolling down her cheeks as he walked away from her. Terror fills him when he realises he might hurt his baby sister by saying no.

But he can't stay. Not for long.

A war awaits him. His daughter is waiting for him back in the arms of her grandmothers. So, he just smiles gently at her.

"Jaemin! Where did you go- oh," their father appears at the edge of the bridge and Jisung stiffens at the sight of him. His sister perks up at his voice and scurries forwards towards her father who then picks her up. He suddenly sees himself in his arms eight years ago and his stomach drops.

Jaemin.

The name that had been erased from his brain. The name that he helped give her himself. He was sitting on his father's knee when he thought of the name himself and proudly announced his baby sister's name would be Jaemin. He was excited to have a sister. To show her the pond in the wild just outside the perimeter of the slums, to teach her how to pick berries and get rough the holes in the fence to Mr Lee's farm.

Youngho's eyes are soft when they gaze over him, much different to how hard his eyes had been eight years ago.

"Jisung... I," his lip has been tended to and now remains scabbed over but he knows it hurts him to speak, the wound tugging dangerously close to reopening. He puts his young daughter down and pats her head and tells her something. She runs away, waving to Jisung with a smile on her face as she flies past him.

"I don't want to talk to you," Jisung grits out but Youngho comes closer and closer. "I have places to be. I have important things I need to attend,"

"Just a few minutes!" His hand curls around Jisung's wrist when he tries to walk past him. Jisung hisses out and pulls his hand back like he's been burned by scalding hot water. "Don't touch me," he growls out.

"Please, Jisung!" He clenches his jaw as he looks at the older man. "I don't have anything to say to you," Jisung spits out. "Don't waste my time,"

"I tried to see you!" He yells out when Jisung turns, taking a step onto the bridge. He freezes. "I tried to come see you... because I missed you so much but they wouldn't let me anywhere near the building... they assured me you were in good hands and there was nothing I could do. I couldn't even get any of the guards to pass a message to you..."

"You thought I was in good hands?" Jisung whips around to stare at him. His brows lift, confusion marring his face. "You really did," he

whispers in disbelief.

“It’s too late for you to say anything that will change my feelings about you. They didn’t treat me well. I wanted to die.” He says plainly and Youngho’s jaw quivers with sorrow. “And that’s all your fault,” he tells him. “Yours and my so-called mother,” he spits out. “You didn’t even speak a word to me on the way up,” he reminds him.

He turns again, his eyes flickering to the tower. He sees Minhø out the front, looking for him. When their eyes meet, Jisung feels like crying. Minhø takes a step forwards, wanting to rush to him, but Jisung shakes his head.

“I hate you. And if I knew I’d see you here, I would’ve never come. None of us would have,” he says.

He hears heavy footsteps behind him and fingers brush by the skin of his wrist before he flinches out of the touch, folding his hands at his front.

“You aren’t even curious to why we’re here?” Youngho whispers and Jisung breathes out heavily. “I have no interest in you,” he replies coldly. He hears a hitched breath.

He walks, his eyes on Minhø who’s standing, watching like a hawk for a wrong move and Jisung knows he’ll fly over. He takes his feet one by one across the surface of the bridge and just as he reaches the other side, closer to Minhø now than his father, he hears his father shout.

“Your mother is dead!” He cries it out, true pain in his voice. Jisung stills as he processes the words that had just filled his ears. “That disease,” he sobs out. “The wretched thing...”

Jisung balls his hands into tight fists. “Good,” he mutters out and with that, he hurries towards Minhø just as he hears a choked cry from behind him.

Minhø takes him into his arms the moment he gets over the next bridge and rushes inside the building with him, shielding them away

from both his father's eye and any other onlookers.

Jisung is still when Minho sits him down on a lounge. He kneels down in front of him, hands grasping Jisung's own tightly. But he stares blankly ahead, his mind racing and conjuring up too many memories.

Laughter. The warmth of his mother as he slept, cuddling against her chest, his father's chest. Dancing with his mother while she cooked dinner. Trying to help his father mend a hole in their wall. Drawing patterns across his mother's belly, feeling his sister within.

He had once loved his mother. His father. They had been his world. His safe place.

He had mourned the loss of that long ago.

"I feel empty," he says slowly. No tears prick his vision and no suffocating pain is crushing his chest. He just feels... hollow.

He can't find it in him to be upset. Nor can he find the energy to care that he had been so blunt and horrible about it.

But they had sent him to his death. Only he came back a little different, reborn from the ashes.

He stands, tugging Minho to his full height.

"We have a meeting to attend... we shouldn't waste any more time than what I already have," Minho doesn't say a word but leads him to the staircase where everyone had ascended minutes before.

There is only one door at the top of the staircase and it's slightly ajar. Jisung takes a deep breath before he opens the door and walks in.

The room is blinding white, with three rows of benches and cushioned seats arranged in a horseshoe shape in the middle of the room. There's a single window in the room that has the blinds placed in a way that it'll be impossible to see in from outside.

Felix beams at him from across the room and pats the long cushioned seat he's chosen to sit on. Jisung hurries over to him and sits close to

his friend. Their knees touch, sitting so close, but Jisung welcomes that. Felix has always made him feel better and after his run-in with his estranged father for the second time in eight long years, that's just what he needs.

Noa is sitting with what Jisung assumes is the Rahka council. Her, Rava and three other people are sitting together, talking amongst themselves quietly.

Rava then clears his throat and smiles. "So now that everyone is gathered here, we should start!" He presses his finger against a white panel in front of him and Jisung watches as a projected screen appears in the middle of the tables and with a few taps of the caller from Minho, Fern and Isa pop up on the projected screen.

"Welcome to the council meeting," Rava says and Fern smiles. Her bronze hair is pulled into a low bun, a strip of green ribbon securing it in place. Isa's curls are soft and bounce as she shuffles slightly, smiling widely.

"We are glad to meet with you all," Fern speaks. "As are we," A woman speaks from next to Rava. She's older than Fern and Isa, in her mid-fifties at least. She wears a brooch at her left breast pocket in the shape of a bow and arrow ready to shoot. Jisung takes a guess that she's a general of Rahka's army force. A man next to her wears a jacket with grease marks on it and the woman next to him has a small device in her hand.

The meeting goes on and on, going over the other settlements positions and strong abilities before Rahka offers their technology and weaponry as well as many transportation vessels as they need. Rahka has a whopping one hundred ships in their mechanical wing, tucked away used for trips to gather materials for science and for trips to trade knowledge of medicinal products across the deserts above them.

"So do you have a rough battle plan so far?" The general--Riki asks them. Valkyrie clears her throat.

"Well, we have many well trained warriors in all the settlements. We will have to have a strong force to fight and teams that offer other

important skills during the battle.” She says and Jisung watches as the Rahkains lean in a little closer, trying to understand what she’s saying through her accent. Jisung had gotten used to her accent, but to people whose first language wasn’t theirs, it must be a little hard to understand.

“So you will need to gather this force,” Riki concludes. “And probably train together to make sure that force can work together,” Isa pipes up.

“That can be arranged,” Fern says. “There are many strong warriors that have expressed interest from many settlements to fight at the front line,”

Jisung gazes over at Hyunjin who is frowning, looking at the table in front of him.

“There’s a flaw in all of this,” Hyunjin pipes up. His frown is deep as he talks. “And what would that be?” Rava frowns at Hyunjin.

“Well... it’s no secret that there’s an outbreak of a deadly disease in the Capital. If we just storm in... we can lose every single woman that not only comes to fight but women that come to aid teams in other ways.”

Valkyrie bites her lip. “Then what do we do? We can’t just not have women not help?” She frowns at him and he nods his head. “We can’t afford that,” he agrees.

Jisung breathes in heavily, knowing exactly where he’s going with this.

“There’s only one option. And it’ll take time... time which we’re growing short on each passing day. But we cannot go anywhere near the Capital until we find a cure. A vaccine against this,”

“And how would we start that?” Rava frowns, now talking as a scientist with a background in disease prevention.

Hyunjin breathes out heavily. “We need a special force to go get a sample.” He looks around the room and swallows thickly. “From in The Capital,”

Notes for the Chapter:

We all knew Jisung was gonna lose his shit!! He certainly did and the me deserves it for sure!!

So many people have been so sus about Rahka but i think this chapter has sorted out the suspicions?? But Rahka have no connection to The Capital for those still hesitant lol

Also what is your favourite settlement?? We've covered all of them now and I'm so intrigued! I personally love The City of Sivra but i also love the aspect of Rahka!!

And Hyunjin proposing the idea of a cure...

Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings! Death, mentions of death, dead bodies, blood, needles and vomit!

This is not a light chapter in particular at the second half!!

"I can go," Minho rises from his seat. Jisung stares at him in horror. "Minho..." He whispers.

"What if they recognise you!" He cries out and Minho purses his lips. "They couldn't have seen me. We snuck around the cameras and then I shut the power off. They won't suspect me,"

"What about if they've figured it out you were a part of the break out and they kill you when they find you?" He hisses and Hyunjin reaches over and places a palm against the small of his back, pulling him back down from where he's risen from his seat.

"I'll go with him, then," Changbin pipes up. "Minho and I were the only ones not seen... unlike Minho who could be targeted, yes... I won't," he smiles softly at them all. "I wasn't a legally documented person... I just lived. In the underground rings until that all... yeah," Minho rubs his back comfortingly and Changbin leans into it.

"I can get whatever you need and Minho can help us get out quicker," he concludes. Jisung stares at them.

It scares him. The thought of them not coming back. To going to the Capital to find them dead at the hands of the government.

"You have to have a calling system somehow," Jisung whispers, gazing down at his lap. Felix grabs one of his hands and squeezes it, his thumb grazing over his skin softly.

"So, then," Changbin swallows hard and glances around the room to the scientists to Hyunjin. "What are we supposed to do...?"

“To get a liable sample... we’d need blood,” Rava replies with a soft frown. “You say this disease carries around in the blood?”

Hyunjin nods. “It’s one of the first things to happen. It spreads throughout the body even before symptoms appear... a blood sample would suffice surely.”

“From a victim,” Minho deadpans and Jisung feels his stomach churn. Felix shuffles beside him and Hyunjin stiffens too.

“I,” Hyunjin gulps, wetting his drying lips with his tongue. “Yes,” he finally mutters out.

Minho doesn’t react to his answer. “Then we’re headed for the fields where they pile the victims,” he concludes and Hyunjin nods, frowning.

Minho’s jaw clenches and Changbin is frowning from beside him. “But...” Changbin speaks up. “Isn’t there a problem with that?” He whispers and Minho turns his head to look at his friend’s face. “Those fields... they dump them there and burn the bodies. To purify them of the disease,”

Jisung feels like he’s going to throw up.

“What barbarism...” Rava grits out through a heavy frown. Jisung agrees with him.

He hadn’t known much about how they tried to ‘control’ the disease, but this... Jisung tries his best to not imagine it.

“I know the way,” Changbin swallows. “I... can get us there,” Jisung doesn’t want to ask him why.

“Then, you must leave as soon as possible,” Riki announces. “If we are working on limited time, we must try to save as much time for the scientists and doctors as much as we possibly can,”

Minho nods in agreement.

“It’s settled, then.” He says as he stands. “Changbin and I leave at first light,”

“Fern and Isa, we await your presence to lead us further into victory,” Riki bows her head at the two women. “We will come as soon as possible,” Isa answers back.

Earlier on in the meeting, they decided that coming to Rava in person will help with directing the ships where they must go and offer more help to guiding a fighting force that will come together very shortly.

As much as Jisung is excited to see them again, his heart is overrun with worry for Minho and Changbin. No matter how he looks at it, he feels like he’ll never feel the warmth of Minho again.

He storms back to their shared house after getting held up with Rava asking him questions about the disease and anything he knew from how it started and how the symptoms showed. Jisung couldn’t tell him much. He hadn’t noticed it quick enough.

Minho turns from the sink where he had just gotten himself a glass of water. His face is cold, hard to read and when he looks at Jisung breathing heavily in the hallway, his shoulders tighten.

“You’re crazy,” Jisung whispers out, disbelief shining in his eyes. “What happens if I don’t get you back? What would I do then?” He storms over to his lover, fists at his shirt and brings him down to his lips, kissing him hard. Minho drops the glass on the bench behind him, water splashes at Jisung’s side but he doesn’t care. He just wants to have the warmth that Minho presses against his body. The velvety soft kisses his lips have to offer.

Jisung doesn’t want to let him go.

Minho responds, his hands enclosing around his hips, squeezing tightly. It elicits a noise from the back of Jisung’s throat and heat flares through his body at the way his body moulds at his touch.

Minho smirks against his lips and Jisung tugs at the short ends of his hair at his nape, dipping his head backwards to allow him to kiss him even harder. He grips harder at his hips and slips a knee between his thighs, prying them apart. Jisung lets out a soft noise and Minho suddenly buckles, picking him up from behind his thighs. He crashes against the vase behind him and it rolls, crashing to the ground

beneath Minho's feet.

They don't seem to notice it. Minho's hands wander over the curve of his thighs, past his hipbones, drawing a line with his fingers up his chest before he clutches at his waist. Jisung breaks away for a breath. His chest heaves and his blood is hot through his veins, a pooling of yearning on fire within the depths of his belly. Minho brushes against his thigh that gives away his obvious desire.

"We shouldn't," Minho mutters against his lips and slowly his hands trail down his thighs to his knees before finally lifting off his body. The lack of the warmth of him fades and Jisung wants nothing more but for his skin to be alit with Minho's touch. The ache in his groin reminds him of that, too.

"Why not?" Jisung frowns at him as Minho takes a step back, bending to pick up shattered pieces of the ceramic vase.

He looks up at him on the counter from the ground, a twinge of something unknown in his eyes. "Because we'll have plenty of time to continue when I come back,"

Jisung purses his lips and swallows the rock forming in the back of his throat. "You have to promise me... that you'll come back,"

Minho looks up at him through his lashes. He takes a large piece of the broken vase into his hand. "I thought you didn't believe in promises?"

"I didn't," Jisung agrees. "But... I know why people make them now. It's... it's for hope. Comfort." Minho gives him a soft smile and sweeps the rest of the pieces into his palm. He drops it into the bin in the corner of the kitchen.

"I don't want to lose you," his voice breaks and tears prick at his eyes. For eight years, Jisung had cried only a few times. The first few weeks in the institution he had cried every day, almost all day but as the weeks went by, then months, years, he hardened to a point where his eyes refused to leak.

But now, after feeling things, not having that gnawing emptiness

inside him, Jisung has been able to let his emotions out. Through tears, laughter.

Minho's face contorts into something akin to pain when he sees him cry. Like his heart is being torn into two pieces as he watches him sob.

"You won't lose me," he hurries over, placing himself between his still spread thighs and bringing him close to his body. "I'm going to come back the same as I am now. All my fingers. All my toes," he grips his face between his palms and with his thumbs he catches his tears, brushing them away like little crystal droplets. "I'll come back to you. I promise,"

Jisung grabs his face, stroking the softness of his cheeks. "And when have I never honoured a promise, huh?" Minho smiles at him and Jisung knows once he makes a promise he'll do anything to make it true. Like the boat, the ship and now.

"You have to keep me updated. When you get to the continent. When you near The Capital, when you're going to leave and when you've made it back. And all over again," Jisung sniffs and Minho lets out a soft laugh. He presses their foreheads together and he hums, his hands falling to grasp at his waist again. With a soft heave, he picks him up from the bench and Jisung wraps his legs around his waist, clinging to him. Minho laughs again.

"I'll promise that, too," he mutters to him, pressing a kiss to the bare skin of his neck.

→

Jisung wakes to find a cold bed in the morning.

He thought he would've woken and been able to see him off, but he stares dully out of the window, his heart aching for him already.

Begrudgingly, he hauls himself out of his bed and wanders to the bathroom for a long warm shower.

He took many showers like this in Mydar, ones where he'd sit underneath the stream of running water, his mind wandering. His body had been weakened then, replenishing blood after Eunbyul's birth and learning how to care for a newborn. Now, he just feels oddly alone.

He knows his friends are not far away at all but all these months by his side it had been Minho. Even when he didn't feel for him romantically like he does now, Minho had been glued to his side. He slept with him to help tend to Eunbyul throughout the night. He did so many things that had ignited something inside of him, bursting with warmth and affection.

His feet take him to Felix.

His best friend welcomes him in with a big hug and he takes him up to his shared room with Chan to bond over cups of cool fruit juice Chan got from a stall somewhere in a bustling market platform and different activities that brought them closer during their escape to Mydar.

Felix is sewing a little skirt made out of yellow and green tulle that he had sourced from Rava somewhere because Jisung's never seen it before.

"It reminded me of Eunbyul," he says when he notices Jisung staring at it. He smiles at his friend. "So of course, as the best uncle she has, I'm making her clothes!"

"She's a very spoiled little girl," Jisung muses at his friend. He goes back to his practice sheet of letters and names with a fond smile on his face.

"Eight months old... I can't believe it," Jisung mutters. "It felt like yesterday we were running," Felix sighs loudly and nods. "And as much as I valued that time, I'll live glad to never have to do that again,"

"I'm pretty sure we're all on the same page with that one," Jisung laughs softly. Something pings in his pocket and he pulls out a caller to see a flash across the screen.

Made it to the continent.

Jisung stares down at it and then passes it to Felix who reads it out for him. He looks out of Felix's window, searching for the sun. It's late afternoon. Night will fall in a few hours at least.

"That was quick," Felix says. Jisung's finger absentmindedly rubs at the words that slowly flicker away.

He stares down at his notebook and pen and scans the columns of messy script finding a certain word.

He taps the screen of the caller a few times until a box comes up with a keyboard across the screen. His brows furrow in concentration as he types.

Safe.

He smiles as he sends it. Minho will understand even though Jisung doesn't quite know how to write full sentences just yet. Felix says he'll get there soon enough, but for now, Jisung is glad he can at least contact them so far away, so close to danger.

Footsteps pound up to the door and Chan swings in, Valkyrie hot at his heels. She almost trips on him as they bound into the room, large smiles plastered across their faces.

Felix and Jisung jump at the rather loud entrance and stare at them with small grimaces. "You won't believe it!" Chan pants out and his chest is heaving. Valkyrie is panting too and Jisung wonders how far they had run because their stamina is seemingly endless.

Jisung raises a brow at them.

"Come on!" Valkyrie cheers, a broad smile on her lips. "Fern and Isa are here!"

Jisung jumps to his feet, a wide smile stretching across his mouth.

“Already?!” He shrieks and they nod. “Come on! They came in one of the small ships!”

As soon as Felix gets to his feet, they rush forwards, following the two much faster runners out of the house, to the gate and across the bridges.

Jisung’s feet pound against the concrete and stone of Rava but he doesn’t stop. His heart quickens in his chest almost painfully after crossing three bridges but they keep on running, past the scientists’ dome, the council tower, to a large platform where a single small Mydar ship is sitting.

Jisung spots two figures with their backs turned. Fern’s bronze hair shines in the sunlight, adding a fiery red hue to it. Isa is bouncing on her heels, her tight curls bouncing with each movement.

Jisung shouts as he gets near and the two women whip around, eyes wide.

Jisung feels his heart burst when Fern angles her body in a way that makes the little thing she holds in her arms glow in the sunshine. His daughter coos loudly as he runs, skidding to a halt just in front of them.

“Oh god,” he takes Eunbyul from Fern’s hold. She comes happily, clinging onto him, her little hands fisting at his shirt. His knees buckle and he falls softly onto his butt, clutching his daughter to his chest as he cries out softly, rocking her in his hold.

She lets out a loud coo, hugging him back tightly. Chan slides his hands underneath his armpits and hoists him back to his feet. He stays close to him, smiling wide at the reunion of father and daughter.

“You go here so quickly...” Jisung stares at the older women who are smiling from ear to ear. Fern reaches out and tucks a strand of hair behind Jisung’s ear. “It’s amazing how fast you can go when you have coordinates,” Isa chuckles and pats his shoulder.

“She missed you lots,” she then whispers. “I too,” Jisung says back. “Thank you so much,” he smiles at him as he rubs his daughters

back.

“We have to put the ship into the garage,” Isa laughs. “Go back to where you’re staying and catch up with that little girl of yours. We will be over after we settle in ourselves,” Fern ushers him after slinging a bag on his shoulder, most likely a bag of Eunbyul’s things. Jisung beams.

“Thank you,” he whispers again and Isa laughs, shooing him away.

→

“Look, Byul!” He points to the butterfly that flies by. Eunbyul squeals and tries to reach a hand out to grab it. “Oh no, we have to leave the pretty butterfly alone. They have to go home, too,” he sings to her as he opens the gate to the horseshoe shape of houses.

He grabs her fist and kisses it and she laughs, opening her mouth to suck on her fingers. “Oh my goodness,” he pulls her hand from her mouth softly. “Are you hungry?” She laughs back at him and Jisung feels like his heart is going to explode.

What he doesn’t expect on the way to going home with his baby after months apart is his fucking father to show up again.

He’s standing in front of him, frozen as he looks at his young son carrying a baby on his hip.

Youngho blinks, eyes flickering to Eunbyul and back to Jisung.

“A baby?” He frowns at him.

“I thought I made it clear I don’t want anything to do with you?” Jisung frowns at him and gently turns Eunbyul’s face away from him.

"I'm your father," he scoffs and Jisung laughs darkly. "Not to me you're not," he deadpans. "You'll never earn that role from me again." He spits at him. Youngho stares at him, pain flashing through his eyes. Jisung doesn't care. He cannot find a single morsel of sympathy for the man before him.

"Is she... is she yours?" He asks quietly then and Jisung pauses for a few moments. He breathes in deep.

"Yes," he answers through clenched teeth. He watches as Youngho blinks before he frowns deeply, a look of pain overcoming his features.

"It... worked?" Jisung purses his lips. "I never thought it would work," he admits.

"Well it did," Jisung spits out. Eunbyul turns her head back, large eyes staring at Youngho. She looks unsure and she leans deeper into Jisung's touch. "I saw you running," he says then. "I thought something was wrong at first, but... you looked happy," His voice lightens.

"I guess if it wasn't for us you wouldn't have her," he points to the baby and Jisung's blood boils.

"Excuse me?" He grits out. His eyes narrow and Youngho flinches at the tone of his voice. "Because of you?" He scoffs. "Don't fucking flatter yourselves or bring my daughter into this. She has nothing to do with you."

"But had we not—"

"No," Jisung spits out. He holds his daughter closer. His rage is frightening himself. It feels as if it is going to overtake his body. A monster curled deep beneath is scratching at his skin, trying to break free. Jisung forces it down. For the sake of Eunbyul.

"Do you know what happened after you sold me?" He speaks slowly, oddly calmly that sends shivers down Youngho's spine. He can only stare at his son, his jaw clenches shut as he watches him.

"They changed me. Made me grow my own womb, injected things

into me. They changed my body, my mind. I wasn't a person to them. I was nothing more than a test rat," he spits out. "I wanted to die each day. I wished it would all end, and it was only because of you that I felt that way,"

His jaw quivers, his eyes blinking quickly.

"Do you know what they thought of me in there?" He asks lowly. Youngho gulps. "I... I—"

"I was a shell. Nothing more than a womb. When I was rescued we ran for eight months. Eight fucking months to get away from something you just handed me over to like I was worth nothing more than those few coins," he feels the jittering of tremors sink into his skin. He bites down onto his lip and rubs Eunbyul's back when she whines out.

"You sent me to my deathbed. Did you know that? Did you think I'd run back to you eventually?" He scoffs at him. Youngho is frozen, his jaw slack now as he watches him. "Do you know what people think of me now?" He gulps at the remembrance of Bjarne and pain echoes in his shoulder where he had dislocated it protecting himself against him. "Because I can carry children?" He seethes at him. "You wouldn't even understand the beginning of it all," he hisses out.

"I thought... we thought—"

"I don't want to listen to anything you have to say. Don't come near me again. Next time I won't be able to hold myself back," he grits out just as Eunbyul lets out a soft cry.

"Dad!" Jaein runs past, crashing against her father's legs. Jisung eyes her before he focuses his attention on his whining daughter.

"Is this it then?" Youngho whispers. It sounds pained but Jisung doesn't care for it. Jisung stares back at him and his little sister that's now gazing up at him.

"Yeah," he mutters out. Jaein's face falls but Jisung purses his lips. Youngho lets out a small choked cry. "Think of your sister in this? Please? She misses you so much," Jaein nods her head at her father's

words.

Jisung gently runs his fingers through Eunbyul's soft hair. "How can someone miss someone they've never met before?" He murmurs. "There was never a start," he continues on. "And there won't be one,"

"You resent us?" Youngho whispers. Jisung looks at his sister that's staring at her shoes.

"I resent you and that woman," he tells him. Jaein is innocent in all of this. As much as it hurts him to deny her of her older brother she's obviously been told about and waited for— Jisung can't find the strength to allow himself to get close to her.

"She was your mother," Youngho cries out. "How can you call her that?"

Jisung takes a step backwards towards his and Minhoo's shared house. "She stopped being that eight years ago," he says slowly before he turns and makes a beeline to the house.

The doors click shut behind him and he lets out a shaky breath.

Eunbyul whines out and he smiles softly at her. "Oh, you must be hungry," he strokes her cheek and she opens her mouth, taking the tip of his finger into her mouth. Jisung giggles at her and hurries to the kitchen.

He carries her on his hip while he digs through the bag he's put on the table and eventually pulls out a bottle and a tin of formula. She coos loudly as he makes the bottle and excitedly slaps his shoulder as he shakes it before he leaps up the stairs, slinging the bag over his free shoulder and carefully laying her on the bed.

She rolls across the mattress, onto her tummy and squeals at him as he sits down. "Good job!" He cheers. "You can roll over now!"

Jisung picks her back up as soon as he rests his back against the headboard of the bed, props his arm up with a pillow and lays her in his arms before popping the bottle to her mouth.

"I missed you," he mutters as she drinks away. She smiles as she eats and Jisung feels his heart warm, a grin stretching across his face. He peppers a kiss against her forehead and breathes in the scent of lavender.

→

Safe.

He smiles down at the singular word and laughs softly.

Changbin peers over and chuckles at it, patting Minho on the back gently.

"He's putting in a lot of effort to learn how to read and write," Minho sighs softly. He finds it endlessly endearing that he's tried his best to convey a message to them even though he's not the best at written language just yet. Minho doesn't care about that, though. Just the fact that he's using his current ability to get it across makes Minho's heart warm.

"How much longer until you think we're going to have to stop and walk?" Changbin asks and Minho gazes out the window. "Well... about at least eight hours I think?" He hums and then nods. "I'm going to try to find somewhere discreet to land, too,"

"What about the forest?" Changbin suggests. "I don't know," Minho admits. "Isn't that a bit far? How long did we run to the forest again?"

"Well, we got there in about... forty minutes of running but we kept going further in to try to lose tracks, remember?"

"I guess that works, then," Minho agrees. "For now we should just rest... chill out and make sure we know what the hell we're getting ourselves into,"

→

Eight hours pass too quickly for Minho's liking.

He lands in the forest, able to make a soft landing and hopefully out of sight far enough away from the wall. It's visible in the far distance and Minho just hopes he'd been quick enough to get in the cover of trees.

They don't have to actually go into the Capital, they just need to make it to the field where the mass graves are.

The forest is just as thick and damp as he remembers it to be.

The last time they had been here, many of them— mostly Jisung— had been defeated by the thick roots of trees that stick out of the ground. Minho and Changbin easily get over them, but Minho almost eats a few leaves when a branch Changbin was holding back slipped out of his hand and whacked Minho across the face.

He pulls the caller from his back pocket and quickly types words in and sends them to the right signal and hopes Jisung can read it or if someone else is with him to read it out for him.

Landed. Safe.

"Do you know the canal from the marsh from near your fathers farm?" Changbin asks him, this time his grip on a branch doesn't falter and Minho is saved from the taste of leaves. Minho ducks under and hums as he frowns. "It's that close?" He mutters and Changbin nods once. "I know... I mean it's past those marshes, but it's still a bit too close for comfort," he finishes off.

"So we have to get around the farm perimeter," Minho concludes. "Well... not really. It's on the side of the slums, not near the wall," Minho pauses for a brief moment.

“That makes sense. Those bastards never cared for those below the wall. Only ones that provided for people within the wall.” Changbin pats his friend on his back. “I know it’s horrible but we’ve got to brave this, Minhó... we need to do this quickly... secretly,”

“Well, there's only one way we can get close without getting caught...” Minhó starts and looks up at the sky. The sun is still high but it’s beginning to fall. Late afternoon.

“We wait for the cover of darkness, then,”

Waiting for night.

When the light fades from the world around them, they wait a little longer for the deep night, where people are sleeping and it's easier to not bring attention to themselves.

“Should we get in the suits now or when we get closer?” Changbin asks and Minhó frowns. “I guess it would be safer to do that here. Away from everything,”

Even though males weren’t even able to carry the disease they’re not only about to venter into a place rampant with death but in a place where lies were formed. They can’t trust that they won’t bring it back and wipe out the female population back in Rahka and around the world.

The suits were given to them by the scientists in Rahka and due to the importance of not being caught, the hazmat suits they’re pulling on now are spray painted black.

Changbin smiles through the transparent face mask built into the suit and Minhó gives him a thumbs up. “Do you have the box?” Minhó nods and lifts the grey box in his left hand that contains all the needles and vials for the collection.

“Lead the way,” Minhó outstretches his hand and gestures to the flat plain ahead.

Last time they had been here, they were speeding over the grass so fast he felt like the wind itself.

Lights flicker in the distance from the inner walls, but the slums are eerily quiet even at this time of the night. The slums are large and when it comes to a condensed place packed with people, quiet is a rare treat. Minhø's stomach drops.

When the ground turns to sludge beneath his feet, his stomach starts to churn in apprehension for what is about to come.

His father is so near, just two hundred meters behind him but he can't go. Not now. He can't risk it right now to see if his father still lives or if his heroic deeds last year had gotten his father killed. He just hopes his father is well.

He's tried not to think about that much because not knowing is worse than the unknown. It leaves him leaving sick, twisted in his gut and his heartstrings in tangled knots. Changbin clutches his hand when the smoke signals twisting high up in the sky rise. It's a thick black, even visible in the dark of the night. The smoke is illuminated by starlight, shining through the brackets of thinning fog.

We're here.

Each step brings them closer.

And closer.

Until they come to a stand in front of mountains.

But it's not mounds of dirt, but corpses.

Minho feels like he's going to throw up and Changbin gags in his suit but somehow manages to keep it down.

The smell seeps into their suits and Minhø swaps to breathing through his mouth, the taste pungent on his tongue.

"We better be bloody quick," Changbin hisses out and Minhø agrees.

The newest victims are piled around the base of a large mountain and

Minho hurries forwards, his hands shaking as he unzips his pocket and gets the eight vials and needles from the sealed box he carries. He passes four sets of needles and tubes to Changbin who gulps and then crouches low near a woman that could've only died within the last few hours. Warmth lingers against her skin and when Changbin moves her arm to allow him to get the needle in easier, he lets out a sob.

"This is horrid," he cries out as he pierces through her skin. He almost expects her to flinch and wake up with a gasp, but she's so still. Hot tears trickle down his face, pooling at his jaw before falling down his throat.

Minho bows his head down as he attaches a vial to the needle and he squeezes his eyes shut, breath shuddering when he slowly begins to extract blood.

He tries not to look at any of their faces, eyes glazed over and blood dripping from their mouths, ears, eyes, soaking their lower halves.

Minho is honestly a little surprised that they have blood left in them to collect for the scientists.

When they're done, they throw the full samples in one compartment of the box, the used needles and collection tubes in another segregated part of the box and as soon as Minho shuts it and locks it, they run, panting and choking as they make a break for it.

They race away, through the boggy marsh, away into the trees where they collapse on their knees, rip off their suits and as soon as fresh air invades their senses, both Minho and Changbin double over and heave, finally emptying their stomachs.

They retch and heave at the base of the trees until there's nothing left in them. Minho slumps against the trunk of a tree unspoiled by vomit.

He gulps greedy amounts of air and tries to calm the jitters running through him.

"Let's not linger," Minho croaks out and Changbin weakly agrees.

They help each other to their feet and trudge back to the ship.

As soon as the doors close, Changbin collapses on the floor and sobs.

“I hate this place,” he cries out, fists thumping at the ground. “I hate them!” He screams, pointing in the direction to where the wall stands. “Oh god, Minho it’s so horrible,” Minho falls to his knees and crawls to his friend, abandoning the samples he was meant to put in the special cooler the scientists gave them specifically for this mission.

He bundles his friend up in his arms and holds him tight.

“All those people... those women, girls...” Minho holds him as he cries, rocking them gently in movements that calm Eunbyul when she wakes up in a fuss during the night. Minho cries silently against his shoulder, his own tears dampening the fabric of his shirt.

He can only hope that what they’ve done will save many from the horrendous death of the disease.

Changbin trudges off after a few minutes of crying and holding each other to scrub his skin raw in the shower. Minho will do the same after he comes out, hoping steaming hot water will wash away the sinking feeling in his gut.

He knows it won’t, but he hopes it nonetheless. A faint smile plays at the edge of his lips as he thinks of soft brown eyes and endless hope.

He gets up on his two feet with a shaky breath and seals the samples in the cooler.

The caller pings in his pocket.

Safe? Miss you.

Some of the twisted feelings in his gut unravels at the sight of the words from Jisung. He gulps and marches to the control room.

Safe.

He types in another message.

Back before you know it. Love you.

Notes for the Chapter:

FIRST OF ALL IM SO SORRY

Last week i had a rough time due to a few things happening and that was a whole thing BUT then after that i had full intentions on posting and making sure you guys didnt think i just dropped this fic... but i have a chronic illness lol and i got pretty sick wooooo. I tried to update lol but I'm prone to migraines and passing out frequently so I couldn't really do anything. I'm feeling a bit better these days so hopefully i can post regularly again and write!! Although before i got sick i had written up to chapter 50!!!

Also not super important but i started editing this fic (I probably will never post the edited version but that's another story) and I'm kind of shocked... like I'm proud of myself for writing this. I'm not usually happy with anything i do and I'm super hard on myself but I'm happy with it!!

Again I'm so sorry!!! <33333

Notes for the Chapter:

Tw! Needles!

Jisung wakes in the middle of the night to the sound of the front door creaking open.

He jumps out of bed, looks over to Eunbyul who's sound asleep in her cot next to his bed.

Feet shuffle over the flooring and Jisung flies down the set of stairs, bounds into the hallway where Minho is staring at him, eyes droopy and his eye sockets dark. They both just stare for a little while until Jisung finally rushes towards him, wrapping him up in a hug.

"I'm so sorry," he sobs to him as soon as he gathers him into his arms.

"Why are you saying sorry?" Minho mutters softly, his fingers playing in the ends of Jisung's hair. "Because," He says. "I can only imagine how... how it was,"

"It wasn't pleasant," Minho agrees in a soft voice. "But if it saves people I... I suppose it was for a good cause,"

"Hyunjin and the others will find the cure for it. I know it," Jisung nuzzles into his neck and presses a soft kiss to his bare skin. Minho shudders against him, his hands wandering to grip at Jisung's hips.

"I missed you," Minho mutters gently, his breath warm against the shell of Jisung's ear. He shivers and holds him tighter.

"Even though it was just over twenty-four hours?" Jisung muses as they pull away. He smiles widely. "I missed you too... and someone else has been looking for you too," his eyes gleam and Minho raises a brow at him.

"I didn't realise our friends like me so much," he wipes away a fake tear and Jisung sighs at his lover as he shakes his head softly.

Although his fake dismay is ruined by the smile that blooms across his face as he looks at Minhø.

He takes his hand and rushes back up the stairs. Minhø comments on how hurried he is to get to the bedroom but it goes straight over Jisung's head because he knows Minhø isn't expecting to find Eunbyul asleep next to their bed.

He creeps into the room and pulls Minhø in. He crawls across the bed and bends down, grabbing his baby from the low cot. When he turns, Minhø is sitting on the edge of the bed, tears brimming up in his eyes.

"She's home," Minhø croaks out and he reaches out a hand to smooth down her dark brown locks. "God, I've missed her," He continues and Jisung passes the sleeping infant to him. Minhø takes her into his arms and settles against the bed, staring down at her sleeping face.

"She's going to be so excited in the morning when she sees you," Jisung sings, mirth laced within his voice. Minhø smiles at the thought.

It's quiet for a few minutes after Jisung tucks himself close to Minhø's side. The elder presses a kiss atop his head and cuddles the baby in his arms.

"You know," Jisung speaks in the comforting silence. He peers up at Minhø, shuffles out of his hold to look him in the eye. He looks at peace now, not the same man he had been in the hallway mere minutes ago. His eyes are open, sparkling when he gazes at both Eunbyul and Jisung. The bags are still heavy beneath his eyes, but he looks like some weight has been taken from his shoulders.

"Youngho was talking to me after I went and got her from Fern and Isa," Minhø frowns at the smaller man in front of him. "Did he give you trouble again?"

"Well... yes, but it's fine. I'm pretty sure I got the message across that I am not even fond of the sight of him,"

"That's only natural," Minhø comments and Jisung hums in

agreement. "I wanted to tell him everything... how much his decision hurt me... but you know what he said to me?" He lets out a hollow laugh at the remembrance of the man's words.

"He said if it weren't for him I wouldn't have had her and that I was meant to be thankful for them because of that," Minho's jaw clenches.

"You know, don't you? How much I hated it at first... that I was pregnant, that I could have babies and when she was born I was so in love... even before she came into this world. For months I was still disgusted because of how much I hated what I had gone through but I loved her so much... and I wouldn't have it any other way because of her..."

Minho reaches out to stroke his cheek. "I know," he tells him. "He doesn't have any connection to her, Sung. She's yours. Yours and yours only. You carried her, brought her into this world. Only you can be thanked for that,"

Jisung leans in and softly kisses him. Minho's eyes flutter shut when their lips touch. His mouth tastes like sweet pineapple that Rahka sends them every day and Minho just wants to drink him up. But Jisung pulls away shortly after, leaving Minho with an unsatisfiable craving.

"So, thank you," he mutters, his hand lingering on his cheek.

Jisung smiles widely.

"Let's sleep?" Minho proposes and Jisung agrees and takes the sleeping baby to put her in her own bed next to him.

Minho feels at ease like this, his heart less heavy.

→

Fern and Isa accompany them to a meeting in the morning after

Minho and Changbin arrived.

The scientists are already studying the samples and finding pathogens and conducting research on how it works with recounts that had witnessed the disease. Minho had to explain in detail with Chan how they witnessed her death.

It is not a moment in Minho's life that he likes to remember. He loved his mother more than anything in the world and seeing her so weak, frail and being poisoned by her own blood— her womb in which that had once nourished him and grew him, birthed him into this world. It left a scar on him. Her death wasn't pleasant, but slow, painful and even looking at her and remembering how much she had hurt in her final moments, how she held him close even though she was in so much pain— it hits a spot in him that causes his walls he built up to protect himself to collapse against themselves.

Chan rubbed his back, calming him after they were done recounting the symptoms, the way the death happens. It's cruel, Minho thinks. The world is so endlessly cruel because no matter how much this disease had taken from them, impacted their lives like others can't even begin to fathom, it's them who have to speak of it again.

And as much as Minho wanted to never think of that time again, if he hadn't the scientists wouldn't be able to understand it to get a cure. A prevention measure. Anything so those people don't have to die such a painful death.

He sits in the meeting room leaving heavier than he did after waking to find Jisung feeding Eunbyul a bottle in their bed this morning.

"I think we should be training forces," Riki comments from her seat. Her brows are furrowed and she runs a hand through her greying dark hair that's clipped short. Noa speaks up from behind Riki and the older woman nods her head.

"Noa believes going to The City of Sivra is the best place for an army to train. They have the largest base I've ever come across,"

"We did not have the pleasure of seeing such a place," Chan says slowly. Instead, they'd witnessed those golden lassos of theirs.

Somehow, Jisung doesn't doubt they have a large training area. There are many guards in the city and they were all trained well.

"I will send a requested to Queen Malti," Riki concludes. "But the scientists must stay here. To further on their research," Fern says slowly. "Oh, of course," Riki agrees. "Limited time calls for their utmost attention on the project,"

"That is settled then," Isa speaks. "If there's any way we can get ships to go gather forces and take them to The City of Sivra? I think it would be wise to gather the forces together now to train, engage in plans and it'll be easier to move when we have everyone,"

"I believe that will be possible," Riki nods. "There's at least one hundred ships we can use for our fleet,"

"That would be well appreciated," Fern smiles at the older woman who bows her head in return for the kind smile.

"Then, I believe this meeting is over. I will send word once we have sorted the training grounds in The City of Sivra." Riki stands from her seat and the three training guards behind her follow her out like lost ducklings following their mother.

Jisung raises a brow as he stands and glances over to Valkyrie who has the faintest grimace on her lips. "I recall you saying you never wanted to step foot near the desert again,"

"A girl can only wish," She sighs out with a shake of her head. "I thought that chapter of my life was over for sure..."

When they exit the building, Jisung finds Hyunjin walking in the direction towards their housing estate and he hurries after him.

"Hey, Hyunjin!" He calls after him and his friend turns and smiles at him once he's near.

"Hi, how did the meeting go?" He asks and Jisung smiles. "Good. We're going to see if Queen Malti will allow us and all the other troops from each settlement to go and train in the city,"

"Huh... I guess scientists and I are staying here then." He then

frowns. "Is Valkyrie upset about that?"

Jisung shrugs. "She's a resilient woman. She laughed at a tiger and called it small!" Hyunjin stifles a laugh at the mention of her oddly humorous rescue. "You know she says snow lions are as long as me, a Chan wide and half my size tall?" Hyunjin's eyes widen as he animates the size with his hands.

Jisung blinks and mutters a curse under his breath. "Hey, where's Eunbyul?" Hyunjin questions and Jisung points back where Felix is carrying her and Chan is playing peekaboo from behind his boyfriend. Her giggles are faint but Jisung hears them.

"Cute," Hyunjin laughs at the scene. "So is there anything else you came to say?" Hyunjin asks and Jisung nods his head. "I wanted to ask about how the studying is going?"

"Oh... well. I guess it's pretty slow because it's so new but we might just have gotten a lead," he tells him. "It's quite strange we're thinking some type of contraceptive would maybe work but... I can't see how that would prevent it since it spreads without much contact from an afflicted person,"

"My friend," Jisung gulps. "Jooyeon. She died when she was seven. From the disease,"

"Shit," Hyunjin mutters. "I'm so sorry Jisung," he lands a hand on the younger's shoulder. "Yeah... I just thought maybe it would be helpful if you knew it doesn't just attack mature wombs,"

"Okay," Hyunjin breathes out. "Then the contraceptive route really doesn't make sense," he offers a soft smile. "Thank you Jisung,"

"No worries," Jisung pats his friend's hand. "You know our wombs are immune, right?" Hyunjin blinks at him.

"I did... but... then does that mean they..." Hyunjin gulps and Jisung stares at him, his stomach suddenly swirling. "Does that mean they know a prevention?"

Jisung lets out a shaky breath. "I wouldn't put it past them," he replies and Hyunjin purses his lips. "Maybe... if we looked at the

differences between your uterus and a typical one we might find something that could help?” Hyunjin suggests quietly. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to. I won’t pressure you into anything, I promise,” he rushes out, knowing full well of his trauma.

“If you think it will create a solid lead, I’m happy to do it... when do you want me to come?”

“Now?” Hyunjin’s eyes narrow as if he’s waiting to be rejected.

“Okay,” Jisung pats his side. “I’ll just ask Felix or Minho to take care of Eunbyul. Although they might not give her back to me when I get back,” Jisung snorts. “I’ll meet you at the dome?” He asks just before he goes to walk away.

“Perfect. Thank you, Ji,”

Jisung smiles at him. “We have to find a way,” He says.

“Yes,” Hyunjin agrees with a heavy breath. “And we will.”

→

Hyunjin squeezes Jisung’s hand tightly as they walk throughout the labs to a certain room blocked off from the rest of the dome.

Jisung breathes heavily as he watches the numerous people wandering around the research labs in long, white coats. Hyunjin tries to distract him by talking to him, which Jisung is grateful for because it works a bit.

“This is where they keep ultrasound technology and other scanning machines,” Hyunjin tells him as he opens the grey doors in front of them. “Away from everyone else,” he finishes and Jisung huffs out a soft laugh as they walk in. Hyunjin pulls him in the dim light to the blue bed in the middle of the room and like muscle memory, Jisung

flops down onto it, rolls up his shirt, shifts down the waistband of his pants until it rests at his pubic bone.

Hyunjin peeks over at him from the machine controls and raises a brow. Jisung can just barely make out his face in the dim light. "That was quick," he mutters and Jisung shrugs. "After seven years of doing it, I don't think I'll ever forget." He tells him and Hyunjin pauses for a brief moment. "I guess so," he whispers out.

Jisung knows that he stills somewhat guilty about his past. But Hyunjin had never prodded or poked at him. He had been there in moments that will haunt him forever, but he hadn't ever elicited pain on him as others had in the facility.

He flicks the power button on the machine and fiddles around with it for a little bit before he gives Jisung a warning about the cold gel, but Jisung has always hissed in surprise when the lubricant hit his skin. This time it's no different. Hyunjin whispers out an apology just as he presses the probe against his lower abdomen.

Hyunjin moves the screen of the machine so Jisung can see it too, something that was never allowed in the facility and truly, Jisung has no idea what he's looking at.

Hyunjin points to something on the screen. "This is the uterus here," his finger moves around a grey shape along the screen. "And here's an example of a 'typical' uterus," he pulls up a different picture on the screen and Jisung peers at it. "It looks smaller?" He says and Hyunjin hums and pulls down the picture. "Your uterine lining is much thicker... and instead of shedding the nutritional lining, you recycle it. It absorbs into the lining, and so on so forth. During the fertile window, your uterine lining is even thicker than it usually is, which is now."

"So... what does that have anything to do with preventing the disease?" Jisung asks softly and Hyunjin gnaws on his bottom lip.

"I have no idea," he admits honestly and then sighs deeply. "It... there might be something that stops it, but I just... damn. You know trying to find a cure for a brand new disease is not a walk in the park. And in limited time, too..."

“Hey,” Jisung sits up, pulls his shirt down and rests a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “It’s okay. You’re doing great. You guys will find it and it doesn’t matter if it does take time... because in the long run, you guys are going to save millions of lives,”

Hyunjin takes a deep breath and hums, nodding his head gently.

“And if there’s anything else I can do to help you out, I’ll gladly do it,” Jisung tells him and Hyunjin peers at him. “Maybe there is something?” He whispers, a frown suddenly marring between his thick brows.

“The implant in your arm,” He says. “The one that controls the hormones you need to have cycles,” Hyunjin pats his bicep where the implant lays beneath his skin.

“I... I don’t know anything about it... all that it needs to stay so my womb doesn’t die inside me,” Jisung comments. “They never explained anything in there. They just did it, never asked,”

“I’m sorry,” Hyunjin whispers but Jisung shakes his head. “It wasn’t your fault. Don’t worry about it,”

There’s a brief pause. “If... if I could get a blood sample from you, I could maybe find something? The hormone regulator might have something to do with it?”

Jisung blinks at him and then holds out his arm. “Okay, then,” Hyunjin stares at him. “Really?”

“Yeah, now poke me because I already miss Eunbyul,” Hyunjin laughs at him and quickly rushes out of the room and returns with a blood sample kit in his hand. Jisung had too many needles poked into him over the seven years that he barely even feels the tip pierce his skin. Although he’ll never get used to the bruising feeling of his blood flowing down a narrow tube to fill a vial.

“Do you need juice or anything?” Hyunjin asks once he’s finished. Jisung shakes his head and slips off the bed, smiling at his friend. “If you need anything else, let me know. Okay?”

“Actually, mentioning Eunbyul... I think something strange is

happening to me,” Jisung admits and Hyunjin raises a brow at him from where he’s concentrating on drawing his blood. “Like what?”

“My chest,” he says. “I think I’m starting to produce milk again,” Hyunjin blinks at him. “That is weird,” he finally says and Jisung nods his head. “It might have something to do with your hormonal implant and the hormones your body releases around her,”

“I don’t understand science,” Jisung deadpans. “I kind of get what your saying but it’s still so odd...”

“I’ll have a look if your blood work says anything. Its not typical that its started when you stopped a while ago,”

“I thought so too,” Jisung sighs. “Thank you though. I thought I should tell you... I know it sounds silly but I wanted you to know just in case things showed up and it brought you down a dead end,”

“Thank you for your thoughtfulness,” Hyunjin laughs softly.

“I’ll walk you out,” Hyunjin holds out his hand and Jisung takes it. Hyunjin talks his ear off the entire time until they’re out of the scientists’ dome. Jisung gives his friend a hug, arms wrapped tightly around his middle and Hyunjin laughs, hugging him back with equal force. Jisung laughs in his embrace.

“Eat well and go to sleep at a good hour, good sleep and eating well will help your mind stay sharp!”

“That it will,” Hyunjin smiles at him. “Now go get that baby of yours. You’ve been away from her for far too long,”

Jisung beams one last time before he rushes off to their residential area. He takes a wild guess and goes into his and Minho’s shared abode.

He finds them both on the bed asleep. Minho is laying on his back, an arm wrapped around Eunbyul who’s laying on his chest, mouth tipped open and cheeks squished. Jisung holds a hand to his chest where it feels like his heart is imploding.

He quietly shuts the door behind him as he creeps out and decides to

search for a snack.

When his cheeks are stuffed with assorted nuts, Felix comes in, eyes wide and a smile on his face.

“Our request has been approved!” He cheers with a wide grin. “Queen Malti urges us to arrive within the next week,” Jisung’s eyes widen.

“That was quick,” he comments and Felix nods his head. “All we really have to do is get all the supplies together... which realistically will probably take just over a week so Riki already sent notice we’ll be arriving in a week and a half. Gives us time to prepare without having to rush constantly,”

“We’ll still probably rush, though,” Jisung laughs and Felix agrees.

There’s a slight pause before Felix begins to talk in a rather meek way. “So... you and Minho... if you want some alone time Chan and I are more than glad to take care of Eunbyul,” Jisung flushes bright red and his eyes drift to where the vase had shattered on the ground not long ago.

“Well... maybe... I think we’d both like that,” he replies quietly, his cheeks hot. Felix pats him on the shoulder and nods his head. “I’ll come by tomorrow morning. I know you haven’t had much time with her yet, but you also haven’t had much time with Minho after you guys got together,”

“I guess so,” Jisung smiles. “Thank you, Lix,”

“Of course! I am her favourite uncle after all,” he smiles widely. “Are they both still asleep?” Felix then questions and Jisung nods with a soft grin. “Minho looked exhausted after the recount this morning and Eunbyul was getting cranky when you left,”

“Naptime,” Jisung points out and Felix giggles. “She definitely has a good sleep schedule,” Felix muses and Jisung nods his head. “She sleeps through the night now,” he says. “Well, these few nights she has. I don’t know if it’ll stay that way,”

“Let’s hope for it. I remember when she used to wake up like seven

times in the night,” Felix groans at the memory. He had taken a few night shifts with Jisung to help out, but eventually, Minho took over that entirely, but Felix still remembers nights where he woke up in a fright to her crying.

“I bumped into Hyunjin by the dome,” Felix then says. “He mentioned you went to get some tests done with him?”

“We’re immune to the disease, Lix,” Jisung reminds him. “It just doesn’t make sense. There’s something in us that makes us immune to it.” He pauses briefly, pursing his lips. “Hyunjin thinks they made it and know what the prevention is... because we just have it,” Felix shivers and bites on his bottom lip.

“Well... I guess they need to know how it spreads as well to fully understand why we can’t catch it. It can’t be just because we were born boys,” Felix mutters. “I hope this leads to something,”

“Me too,” Jisung takes in a deep breath. “I really hope so,”

→

Felix comes after breakfast to take Eunbyul. She’s happy to see him but when Felix grabs her things and takes her out the door without Jisung she begins whining and Jisung rushes forwards, peppering soft kisses on her cheeks. She squeals and holds his face, planting a slobbering smooch on his cheekbone. Jisung laughs at her and brushes her mess of brown hair that’s beginning to curl in soft, loose ringlets.

Minho kisses her goodbye and he gets given a kiss from her as well along with a little tinkling giggle.

He then turns to Jisung and smiles widely. “So,” he says, reaching out to grip his hip. “What are we doing?” He leans in, capturing his lips in a soft kiss. Jisung laughs against his mouth and gently pushes him

away.

“Well...” he stares up at him. “The waterfall... that you can just see from our window... I want to go there,” Jisung admits. Minho raises a brow. “What about tigers?”

“What about them?” Jisung says. “Did you forget about the bear we encountered before?”

Minho snorts. “As if I’ll ever forget you saving my ass from that bear.” He smiles widely and pats Jisung’s hip. “I’ll take my gun just in case, then?” Jisung nods in agreement. “Did Rava set your hand up on the system?” Minho then asks him and Jisung nods. “The tree we need to scan our hands on for the ladder to come down has a flower carved into its bark.”

There's a ladder that leads down to the ground a few meters away from the bridge that leads into their residential area and Jisung laughs joyfully as the ladder suddenly extends to the ground after he scans his hand on the small screen by the gate.

“I thought Mydar had the most advanced tech...” Minho breathes out. “Rahka is on a different level,”

“I guess that’s what happens when your whole colony is basically scientists,” Jisung turns to go down the first step. He holds onto the rails and the step lowers his body down, descending past the green tops of the trees, to the thick undergrowth and finally the damp earth that’s soft underneath his feet.

He looks up to see Minho clutching tightly on the rails, his eyes shut.

“You’re okay,” Jisung grips him by his thigh when he’s in reach and he clings onto him like how Eunbyul does when he picks her up from her cot in the mornings.

Jisung laughs and heaves in a deep breath when he picks him up, putting him firmly on the ground. “Big baby,” he pokes his cheek and Minho hisses at him, but Jisung only laughs back at him.

“So do you even know how to get to this waterfall?” Minho questions him and Jisung snorts. “Of course not,” he says and Minho lifts an

eyebrow at him.

“But, I also think we’ve spent enough time in the wildness of nature to figure out that we just need to follow the sound of the water...” Minho breaks out into a laugh and Jisung quickly joins in and then grabs his hand, running towards the sound of the roaring water that grows louder in his ears each step he takes.

They leap over tree roots and sometimes have to climb over the ancient ones that are almost as tall as them.

With a yelp, Jisung tumbles down a tall root and falls onto his butt while Minho laughs as he jumps off, landing on his feet easily. He offers a hand to Jisung and with a pout, the younger accepts the help and snorts when Minho brushes off the dirt on his butt.

“Woah,” Jisung then breathes out when he lifts his eyes.

Rushing water runs down a steep cliff into a large pool of crystal blue water. Trees have cleared around this spot, letting the sun in, but the thick canopy hides it away from the rest of the world around them.

Jisung steps forwards, inching towards the water as if he’s in some type of trance.

He’s broken out of his little moment when Minho zooms forwards, naked as the day he was born and jumps into the water.

“How the hell did you take your clothes off that fast?” Jisung squeals at him when the water splashes over him.

“Come on in!” Minho stands in the water that comes up to his waist and Jisung gulps.

Jisung bends down to loosen his shoelaces and then kicks them off his feet. He then hooks his thumbs against the waistband of his pants and begins to shimmy them down his legs when he looks up and finds Minho staring at him intently.

“Really?” Jisung lifts a brow at him and with a cheeky smile, Minho ducks beneath the water and Jisung takes that as a chance to get the rest of his clothing off. He leaves it in an unfolded pile with Minho’s clothes.

The water is cool against his skin, but against the hot and humid temperature of Rahka, it's refreshing and Jisung laughs as he sinks into the water, walking over to where Minho is, a little deeper in staring at him.

Water droplets fall from his chest, rolling down firm muscle that he's built up much more since the earlier days of their journey. Jisung gazes back at his face, but Minho doesn't meet his eyes.

He's staring at him with such a burning intensity in his eyes that makes Jisung feel like he's on fire and the water around them will soon boil with how hot his blood has suddenly spiked.

Minho reaches out a hand that slides over his shoulder, down his back to his waist and it keeps going. His hand disappears beneath the water and Minho looks him in the eye when his fingers still travel downwards. To his hipbone, fingers gripping into the flesh of his ass that slowly moves down, fingers grasping against his thigh, pulling it outwards slightly.

Jisung braces himself by putting his two hands against Minho's firm chest.

"I've wanted to do this for so long," Minho admits in a low tone. His breath fans across Jisung's mouth and softly, he leans in and kisses him. Minho presses their lips together with more passion, rougher and messier. His hands settle on Jisung's thighs and with a single movement, he's parted his thighs and pushes their fronts together. Jisung breaks off the kiss with a strangled gasp.

His cheeks are flushed bright pink, eyes wide and Minho leans in again, drinking him up in the kiss. He feels the softness of his bare skin against his own, the smoothness of his muscles beneath his skin and the sweetness of his mouth and the delirium of exploring the dips and curves of Jisung.

He can feel him, hard against his belly, thighs tensing with each stubble moment they make.

"To touch me?" Jisung lets out in a soft whisper and Minho groans low in his throat at the breathlessness of him even after a few kisses

and touches.

“To feel you... to have you trust me this much... so I can touch you, show you love through touch,” Minho whispers in his ear as his hand wanders from its place on Jisung’s hip.

“I’ve never—“ Jisung cuts himself off with a soft mewling sound just as Minho fingers ghost over the tip of his erection that’s pressed against the elder’s abdomen. He shifts in his hold and Minho watches as his eyes widen when his hardening cock presses against the inside of his thigh. “Oh,” he breathes out and his eyes soften suddenly, all fire in them burning out and leaving soft and warming embers in its wake.

“Then let me show you,” Minho mutters against his mouth before he kisses him again, soft before he pulls at his bottom lip with his teeth. Jisung gazes at him with glazed eyes, dazed off kisses and soft shocks of pleasure that burn up his spine every so often.

Jisung’s hands wander over the tense muscles in Minho’s shoulders, mapping out each dip, each crease in his skin. He connects their mouths again and tries to copy how Minho bit his lower lip and satisfaction burns in his belly when Minho lets out a soft grunt.

Minho lets his hands roam once more, gripping at his thigh, fingers dancing beneath the water to rest on his ass, fingers denting into the soft flesh. Jisung’s hips buck and his cock slides over Minho’s abdomen and a shuddered breath rasps from his throat. Minho hums low and moves his other hand that was securing Jisung’s position on his hip to his ass.

“Wait,” Jisung pants out as he breaks off the kiss. His eyes are soft and wide, lips swollen from kisses and soft bites, his face flushed. “Wait,” he repeats and he holds Minho’s face in his hands. Minho stops his movements and keeps his hands still.

“We... we can’t have sex,” Jisung says and Minho blinks at him softly, waiting for him to continue. “When Hyunjin was running tests yesterday he told me I’m in my fertile window,” Jisung swallows and purses his lips. “You... you can’t get me pregnant now,”

Minho laughs softly and presses a kiss to the corner of Jisung's mouth. He doesn't question the 'now' he just noses at his cheek, smiling.

"There's a lot more to sex than you think. If you don't want to do that, there are other ways I can show you?"

Jisung's eyes seem to shine and there's a flicker of relief. Minho's thumbs rub comforting patterns along his hips. "Okay," Jisung says, nodding his head. "I trust you," he whispers and Minho smiles hard at that.

"I know," he whispers back to him and with gentle movements, he shifts Jisung down so his feet hit the sand below. He wraps an arm around his waist, knowing too well how he reacted to just his kisses alone back in the City of Sivra. His other hand creeps from his ass brushes past his sharp hipbone and his fingers curl around the base of his hardened cock.

Jisung breathes out heavily, his lips parting as he stares into his eyes. Minho shifts his weight and presses their pelvises together and Jisung lets out a choked gasp when Minho's cock, thicker than his is pressed against his, Minho's hand wrapped around the both of them.

When he moves his wrist, fingers moving easily up both their shafts, he lets out his own broken moan as Jisung cries out softly, his hands bracing himself on Minho's chest as he struggles to keep his eyes open through the fiery pleasure burning throughout him.

Minho's thumb slides against the head of his cock and Jisung whimpers out, his fingernails digging into his skin as if he'll find purchase against him. He flutters open his eyes and tilts his head upwards, meeting his mouth with Minho's. He moans into his mouth as Minho's hand works around the both of them and Minho's arousal spikes each time he makes a sound.

The water around their bodies is cool, a stark difference to their body temperature that's warmed with desire.

Minho moves his hand faster and after a few pumps, Jisung presses himself harder against Minho, muttering pleads underneath his

breath. Minho flicks his wrist in a rhythm that he soon finds Jisung moaning at loudly, fingernails scratching into his skin until it burns with the rawness of broken skin. He doesn't mind but finds pleasure in the way Jisung is lost in him, how he is so pliant in his hold, how he seems to mould against him.

His spine curves and he mutters his name under his breath. Minho's groans turn into moans of his own as he begins to hit his climax. Jisung hits it moments before his own, back arching and mouth parted as he calls out his name in a whimper that rings in his ears. His body jerks as he chases his own release, overstimulated but Minho continues for three more pumps before he's hissing through clenched teeth, hips jerking forwards as he hits his high.

Jisung falls against his chest, heart rate fast and his breathing heavy. Minho isn't too much better, either but he holds him up nonetheless.

"The waters cold," Jisung breaks the silence after a while with a whine and Minho chuckles. "Aren't you sleepy?" Minho asks him and Jisung clings to him, his legs wrapping around his waist. "Yes, but the water shocks me out of the sleepiness,"

"Oooh, who's the big baby now?" Minho teases him but walks to the shore, complying with Jisung's wishes. It had gotten cold after their body temperature dropped back down and the sun has been blocked by the clouds now.

Minho drops him down once they're out of the water and he watches from the waterline as Jisung walks towards his mess of clothes and dries himself with the towel he brought down from their bathroom in Rahka before he slides on his underwear and his pants.

Minho bites his lip and grabs his own towel, following Jisung's actions.

"I know you were staring at my butt," Jisung accuses him as he turns around just as Minho's pulled up his pants. Minho snorts but he can't control his smile. Jisung only chuckles at him and hits him playfully.

"As much as I loved spending time with you," he says as he wanders closer. He reaches up and presses a soft kiss to his mouth. Minho

responds by holding his waist, pressing him to his body and deepens the kiss. Jisung falls into it and they kiss until they have to pull back to breathe. Their hands linger on one another bodies but softly, Jisung peels himself off Minhø and smoothes his worn white shirt. Minhø tugs on his grey button-up, but leaves it unbuttoned, leaving his chest bare for Jisung to stare at.

“As you were saying?” Minhø laughs at him and Jisung’s cheeks turn pink. “Well, I was saying as much as I liked this... I also miss Eunbyul already,”

Minhø smiles widely at him. “Me too,” he admits. “So let’s go back so we can get this baby of yours,” Minhø slings his towel over his shoulder and takes Jisung’s from his hand, slinging it over his other shoulder.

“Minhø,” Jisung’s voice is soft and when he looks back at him, halting in his step he was beginning to take in the direction they came from.

Jisung is smiling gently and it reaches his eyes that sparkle even without the bright sunlight to make them glow like burning embers.

“Our baby,” he says in the softest voice Minhø has ever heard him speak in.

Minhø stares at him. “She’s our daughter,” Jisung tells him.

“I...” Minhø starts, his throat suddenly dry. “I didn’t—“

“That doesn’t matter, Minhø,” Jisung tells him gently, still smiling. “You are as much as her father as I am. She loves you so much. You love her so much. Our daughter. Just because I bore her doesn’t mean your not her father. You care for her... you heard her first cry. You stayed with her when I couldn’t. You loved her for me while I was unconscious and you never stopped. You stayed up with me in the night... fed her for me. She’s our daughter,”

Minhø has never cried much in his life.

But he shatters just like that. He sobs, clutching onto Jisung as he blubbers out ‘our daughter’ over and over again until Jisung cries and

Minho lifts him off his feet.

“Our daughter,”

Notes for the Chapter:

SOFT SOFT SOFT

Also kind of spicy yes I'm embarrassed I honestly have never done too much smut before i feel... odd BUT there it was 🤔 if it sucks im so sorry lol idk what to say :/ on my last fic someone attacked me bc it wasn't explicit enough for them lol

ANYWAYS I'm feeling much better this week!! I'm writing again and I'm so happy also wasting my time playing Genshin impact but Australia is back in lockdown so theres not that much to do other than write and do things to occupy my time lol

I missed u guys so much tho ☹️ if u ever want to talk HMU on twitter!!

[my twt!](#)

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The rolling sand dunes glitter beneath the bright rays of the sun.

Jisung holds onto his squirming and excited daughter as they near the outer gates of The City of Sivra. Ships follow behind their own, carrying forces from other settlements Rahka went out to collect.

Their force is large. Big enough to need one hundred and fifty eight ships to carry forces to their gathering point in The City of Sivra.

The fleet lands fifty meters within the city gates. Lines of ship cover the desert landscape, arranged in neat rows for easy take off and finding which ship belongs to each flying crew. Jeongin jokes about all the smooth landing and how they're not going to need to spend the next three months of their lives digging out the ships from the sand. Jisung shivers at the mere thought and Valkyrie hisses at him, pulling his ear.

He yelps and runs away, hiding behind Felix.

Eunbyul pulls at Jisung's shirt and he rubs her cheek with his finger which she takes into her mouth with a little giggle.

"Minho," he calls and the elder turns from the doors that he's just opened. "Is there the milk I pumped in the fridge?" He asks, gesturing to their daughter sucking on his finger. "Yeah, I'll go get it," he hurries off to their shared kitchen and comes back quickly with a warmed bottle in his hand.

Eunbyul spots it and coos loudly. Jisung laughs at her and thanks Minho and takes it, arranges her in his arms for her to lay, her head higher up than the rest of her body before he pops the teat into her mouth.

“Well, we’re ready to go then?” Changbin pipes up and Jisung nods as Minho slings Eunbyul’s bag over his shoulder.

Chan reaches out a hand for Jisung and he takes Eunbyul’s bottle from her briefly and accepts the eldest’s help so he doesn’t hurt Eunbyul jumping down.

He smiles at him and pops the bottle back into her mouth. “Thanks,” Chan pats Eunbyul’s soft brown curls and smiles.

They head to the gates and pause in front of them before they creak open after a few moments. Minho and Jisung share a look of confusion before Minho shrugs and steps into the city.

It is as bustling as ever, streets colourful and the lights bright and shining against the sandstone fountains of buildings. Eunbyul peers at the city around them with wide eyes as she drinks and Jisung stares down at her, marvelling at her taking in her surroundings. Her eyes flicker to the colourful adverts high up and she smiles around her bottle.

“My dear children!” Comes a shrieking voice and Jisung turns on his heels to find Mother Barbada running towards them, her green

pleated skirt bunched up in her worn hands as she flies towards them.

Changbin runs towards her and wraps her into a big hug as soon as she's close. She laughs and embraces him tightly, with the comfort of a mother that Changbin had lost early on in life. She grew on them all and became important to them all. Her name is fitting. All of them have been long without seeing their mothers or they'll never see them again, but after being with Mother Barbada for so long it was like being comforted by their mothers. The warmth of her arms and the soft smile that eased their worries.

Jisung missed her, too and he waddles forwards just as she lets go of Chan who went in for a hug after Changbin. "Hyunjin is not here," she comments just before she sees Jisung.

Hyunjin stayed back in Rahka to conduct more research and try to find something that could give even the slightest clue to why he, Felix and Seungmin were unable to contract the deadly disease that manifests inside wombs.

Jisung had allowed a few more tests. More blood work and a few scans of the implant in his arm even though he had no idea how that would help with anything but he was willing to do anything that could possibly lead to a discovery. He just hopes Hyunjin and the other scientists will find something in those tests and when he sees Hyunjin next he'll be speaking about the cure animatedly, his hands flying around him as he talks.

Chan tells Mother Barbada he'll join them soon and then her eyes zone onto Jisung, flickering from his face to his daughter looking around in his arms.

“And you’ve brought someone new!” She laughs as she caresses the baby girl’s cheek and she smiles around her bottle. Jisung pulls it from her mouth to show Mother Barbada her smile and the old woman coos at the infant, squishing her cheeks together. “She’s gorgeous,” she whispers to Jisung and he nods his head. “Thank you,” he mutters back before he gives her a hug with his free arm.

“I missed you,” he says and she laughs. “It has been awfully quiet lately... I am glad you are back. Even if it is not forever I will always look forward to your presence in my walls,”

“Well, now we’re back,” Minho tucks an arm around Jisung’s waist. “And this time, we’ve brought our army,”

Mother Barbada smiles wide. “I knew you children were more than capable of gathering a force...” She pats Minho’s shoulder just as Fern, Isa and a hoard of people flock in behind them. “Now! I must get you all some rooms. Leaders, if you shall follow me, I have accomodation for you all!”

Mother Barbada pulls them along too and they follow her, fearing if they don’t they’d face the wrath of her and her cooking spoon instead of the walls of the kitchen.

Jisung and Minho are told to go to the room they shared previously and they follow the old woman’s wishes, happy with the room that holds a special memory for the both of them.

Valkyrie storms into their room just as Jisung has sat on the bed to burp Eunbyul and he flinches at the sudden intrusion. “Woah, a knock would’ve been nice?” Minho chuckles out but his face softens when he notices the panicked expression on her face.

“Valkyrie? Are you okay?” Jisung asks her and she bites on her bottom lip, her lip ring clinking as it hits her teeth.

“My father is out there,” she croaks out and she looks like she’s trying to not cry. She looks down and the neon lights from the wide window illuminate her face, shining on the scar that she acquired last time they arrived in The City of Sivra. Jisung understands then.

“Hey, Valkyrie,” he passes Eunbyul off to Eunbyul and he goes to give her a hug. She wraps her arms around him, her chin resting on his shoulder. “He’s your dad... there’s nothing to be scared of. He loves you so much,”

“I know,” she croaks out. “I just... I don’t want him to blame any of you... when it comes to me he loses most of his logic and just wants to protect me. It’s not our fault the ship crashed. It’s no one’s fault that I got this,” she pulls away and points to the scar. “But he... he might blame himself,”

“Valkyrie...” Jisung whispers and pats her cheek gently. “He’ll understand. Don’t hide from him I know he’s been waiting to see you again ever since you got on the ship back in Scalva,”

“And I have waited to see him,” She admits softly. “I will talk to him... thank you, Jisung,”

“Your welcome,” he gives her arm a soft pat. “Come back if you need anything else, yeah?” She nods and smiles before she slips out of the door.

Eunbyul is asleep in Minhø’s arms when he turns back to them and he smiles softly at them. “I’ll get the other bags,” he whispers and Minhø hums, his finger softly tracing their baby’s features.

When he exits the room, he finds Mother Barbada standing outside their door, in her arms a small yellow dress in laying across the length of her arm. She looks a little flustered that he’s come out so suddenly but she smiles, holding up the small piece of clothing.

“For your daughter,” she tells him. “You said you like when she wears yellow,” she hands him the dress and Jisung pauses, inspecting the intricate embroidery along the fabric. Suns and stars are stitched with gold and silver thread.

“Her name is Eunbyul,” Jisung whispers gently as his fingers trace over the shining stars. “Eunbyul,” Mother Barbada tries the foreign name on her tongue. Their names had been difficult for her to pronounce correctly for the first few days they stayed with her, but over time she became accustomed to the pronunciation. She smiles wide when Jisung nods his head when she pronounces it right.

“Her name means star,” he smiles wide at her. She laughs and pats the fabric in his hand. “Fitting,” she muses. “Just for your little star,”

“Yes,” Jisung breathes out. “Thank you. Mother Barbada,” he pulls her in for a hug and she laughs cheerfully.

He wanders back into the room with the little dress and Minho peaks up from where he’s laying, staring at their sleeping daughter. “Mother Barbada made her a dress,” Jisung lifts it up and Minho smiles wide. “We should put her in it for the dinner tonight,” he chuckles and Jisung agrees.

A big feast is on tonight in the palace with everyone that is playing a role in what’s to come. The royals have been planning this event since Rahka first sent them the message a week and a half ago.

Jisung hauls both his and Minho’s bag of stuff up the stairs and quietly drags them into their shared room before he makes a beeline for the bed where Minho is still lying, patting Eunbyul’s tummy like how Jisung usually does when she’s restless.

“Have a nap with us,” Minho mutters out as his eyes shut. “We need to look like we’ve gotten sleep tonight,”

Eunbyul hadn’t slept well when they were flying over. She cried almost all night and only would calm when she was being rocked but that also required Minho and Jisung to take turns staying up and lulling her back to sleep.

It must’ve been the ships slight vibration that kept her awake because now she’s sleeping fine. Or she might just be too exhausted to even fight sleep now. Either way, Jisung takes Minho’s suggestion and throws a leg over Minho’s thigh, hooking himself close to him and

cradling Eunbyul between their chests.

Valkyrie breathes deep before she knocks on the door in front of her. Mother Barbada was overjoyed when she went looking for her to ask which room her father had been given. The old woman told her in a hurry, excited that one of the children she cares so much about is to be reunited with a parent that they've all lacked for some time now.

And so it turns out, Odin had been given the room across the hall from her own room she'll share with Hyunjin once he joins them. She hopes it'll be soon.

A gruff voice sounds out and shuffling footsteps fill her ears. Her heart picks up in her chest and when the door opens and his ageing face and light braids come into view, she throws herself against him, clutching around his broad chest, snuggling into her fathers warmth.

"Oh!" He heaves out and tips her face up so he can see her eyes. Love and mirth overwhelm his dark orbs.

"Papa," she softly says as she struggles out of his bear-like embrace. She smiles wide up at him and her fathers lips pull upwards softly at her.

He reaches out and cups her cheek, his thick thumb tracing over the pink scar along her face. "My daughter," he speaks in her native tongue. "My warrior," he muses softly. "Your face now tells a story, too," his other hand pats the tattooed skin of her arm. His hand slides down the snow lion on her forearm and he smiles broadly at her.

"I have missed you," she whispers back to him. "And I have missed you," Odin replies, giving her hand a squeeze.

"But... where is my son in law?" Odin asks his daughter and she purses her lips. "He stayed behind in the previous place we went to," she tells him in their native tongue. After so long it feels good to be able to speak her first language and to hear it fill her ears. When they win this battle she'll have to teach Hyunjini and eventually the rest of her friends how to speak her tongue. "To find a cure," she finishes and Odin raises a brow.

"Finding a cure?" He frowns. "I know," she sighs. "We know it'll take time. But we have no other choice. This is the only way we'll be able to win," she tells him. "So all is women and people that bear wombs do not die the same death those poor thousands upon thousands have already suffered. It's enough. We need this,"

"I believe you, my daughter," Odin sighs out. "It's just a scary thought that I could lose you..."

"You will never lose me," Valkyrie whispers. "And that's a promise, Papa,"

They're awoken by Eunbyul softly crying a few hours later. The afternoon sun is a dark gold through their window and Jisung quickly blinks himself awake.

Minho is just stirring when he's picked up their daughter, pulled her to his chest and pats her bottom to calm her.

Minho groans out and cracks open an eye. "I'll get a bottle," he sighs and goes to slide off the bed.

"Don't worry," Jisung yawns quietly. "It's easier to nurse her anyways," he mutters before he raises his shirt and unhooks the singlets he's grown used to wearing after being reunited with his baby. She latches on without a fuss and Jisung sighs as he runs his fingers through her hair.

Felix comes into their room as Minho settles back against the bed and the younger purses his lips. "Have you heard anything from Hyunjin?"

Jisung shakes his head. "Last thing I heard was that he was taking my blood samples to the lab. If he finds anything he will probably call in. You know excited he gets," Felix hums in agreement. "It's just a shame that he won't join us for the dinner,"

Jisung pats the bed and Felix joins him, kissing Eunbyul's foot. "Look how big she is now," he pouts at the baby and Jisung lets out a fake cry. "My baby," he kisses the top of her head. "Nine months old,"

"Don't remind me," Minho says with a groan. "I remember when she fit in my forearm. She was so tiny,"

"She's still tiny," Felix muses. She is small, much smaller than other babies Jisung has seen that are the same age as her. "I blame it on Jisung," he laughs and Jisung hits him with his free hand.

"We should begin getting ready," Minho then says as he looks out of the window. The sun is falling from its high place in the sky, signalling darkness will be on its way soon and they need to be at the palace for the sunset.

"Mother Barbada's outfits," Jisung says as he stands with his daughter. "We should all wear ours,"

"Of course!" Felix cheers. "I'll meet you guys in the foyer when you're ready." Felix kisses Eunbyul on her forehead and then zooms out.

Minho lifts up Eunbyul's new dress and then clutches it to his chest. "I think I might cry," he says and Jisung laughs at him.

"Can you get the bath water ready?" Jisung asks Minho who nods. "I'll burp her then bring her in."

Minho wanders off to the bathroom attached to the room. He's glad they've come to The City of Sivra. It's technology makes life a little easier, unlike Sunsen or Scalva. Trying to take care of Eunbyul back in Sunsen had been more of a chore than it ever has been.

Jisung sings as he carries her into the bathroom and she flaps her hands around, babbling along with him. Minho is knelt at the bath, his hand swirling around the soapy water.

He takes off her soft white onesie and her nappy and she squeals, kicking her legs. "Bath time!" Jisung cheers, picking up the naked baby. "Splash, splash!" He sings and passes her to Minho so he can strip off.

"The bath is so deep," Minho muses as Eunbyul splashes at the waters surface. Bubbles fly up and hit her face and she flinches in shock. They laugh at her and Minho wipes the bubbles away before she giggles loudly, kicking her legs in joy.

"Hurry up," Minho laughs and Jisung throws his shirt at him, covering his and Eunbyul's face while he climbs into the bath. Minho shakes the shirt off his head and it falls, draping down Eunbyul's whole body. Jisung bursts out with laughter and when Minho plucks the shirt off of her she giggles loudly, arms and legs flapping in excitement.

Minho passes her to Jisung and she squeals as he places her on his knee, splashing around in the water.

“She’s so happy,” Minho takes a handful of bubbles and blows it at Eunbyul. She slaps the bubbles around her and babbles loudly as she splashes water around her. It splashes her in the face and she pauses before laughing loudly, turning to see Jisung’s face and his reaction.

“Come on! Lets get you clean!” Minho reaches out with the face washer and dunks it in the water before he wipes her face down. She laughs loudly at him, babbling away.

Once she’s clean, Jisung passes her off to Minho who dries her off and dresses her as she tries to make her great escape by rolling across the floor. Jisung grabs the washer and wipes himself down, removing the grime from his skin.

“What have you fed this child?” Minho snorts as he grabs her and throws her towel over her. “Milk.” Jisung laughs. “And mashed bananas for breakfast,”

“She’s gone crazy,” Minho leans away from her when she lets out a scream. “My god,” Jisung purses his lips to try to hold in a laugh. “She’s had a good sleep, she’s got all her energy back,” Jisung stands from the bath, water tricking down his body back into the tub. Minho is too distracted with their daughter to pay him any attention and Jisung laughs as he tries his best to get her to keep her from rolling so he can get a nappy on her.

“Byul,” Jisung sings. “Stay still for your dad! Little wriggly worm,”

He dries himself off and when he’s sufficiently dried, Minho has only just wrangled her nappy on. “At least she won’t pee on you,” Jisung

muses and Minho turns to give him a glare. “You can dress her, she’s always still for you,”

He wraps his towel around his waist and picks up his daughter, taking her dress out with him. He places her down on the bed, one hand still on her tummy as he reaches down in her bag and pulls out her bear. “Here you go,” he passes it to her and she holds it in her chubby fists, cooing. She tries to eat it, but she keeps still long enough for Jisung to slip the dress over her head. He takes her arms one at a time and gets them through the sleeves. The straps are thick at her shoulders and sheer yellow fabric falls down to her elbows. The skirts of her dress are layered, the hems decorated with glass beads that catch the light.

“Pretty girl!” Jisung grabs her fist and pumps it in the air before he bends and kisses her cheek. She laughs and grabs his face with both of her hands and plants a sloppy kiss right beside his nose. “Oh thank you!”

“Baby wrangler,” Minho tuts as he wanders from the bathroom in his towel. “That was quick,” Jisung muses.

“Yeah, well trying to get this little star in her nappy took a bit more time than I expected,” Eunbyul coos at him and Minho pouts. “I can’t even be annoyed, that’s not fair!”

Jisung nods in agreement and wanders over to their bags as Minho takes Eunbyul into his hold so she doesn’t roll off the bed. “You should wear the yellow one,” Minho tells him. “And I’ll wear my red one,”

“We’ll all kind of match, then,” Jisung smiles as he pulls out the pieces of Minho’s outfit. “Like fire,” Minho concludes. Jisung chuckles and finds his items quickly.

He throws Minho his clothes and he catches it with his free hand.

“Where are you going?” Minho calls after him when he notices him walking towards the bathroom. “To get changed?” He blinks back at him and the tips of Minho’s ears redden. Jisung snorts and closes the door behind him.

When Jisung emerges Eunbyul is laying across Minho’s chest, banging her teddy bear down on his nose.

“Oh my god,” Jisung shakes his head at them and picks Eunbyul up from Minho’s face. Jisung’s outfit is a warmer shade of yellow, closer to orange than yellow but he’s glad since Eunbyul’s dress doesn’t blend in against his top or veil that he’s pinned in place.

“If you’re ready, lets get going. We have to be there before sunset,”

Minho heaves himself off of the bed and Jisung lifts his free hand and runs it through his hair, smoothing down the spiky bits. Eunbyul pulls at his veil and Jisung kisses her fist. Minho picks up her bag and opens the door for Jisung.

“Jeongin is probably starving,” Minho laughs when he hears his whines from floor below. “Poor kid,” Jisung snorts.

Descending the stairs, Jisung sees Valkyrie trying her best to get away from Odin fiddling with the veil over her head. “Papa,” she hisses at him and says something in her native language that makes her father hum in thought and pat her head fondly.

“Odin,” Minho greets him with a firm pat on his bicep. The big man turns and laughs loudly when he sees them. “Good to see you!” He brings them both into a hug and Jisung squeaks when he squeezes them. “Hey— Eunbyul!” The baby cries out and Odin pulls away, flustered.

The man mutters something in his first language and bends to pat Eunbyul’s cheeks. “I didn’t even notice her,” he apologises to Jisung. She calms down quickly, not hurt, just shocked at the sudden movement. She clings onto Jisung, her head resting against his shoulder.

Mother Barbada coos loudly when she comes around the corner and finds the baby in her dress clinging to her father.

“Come on everyone!” Jeongin stomps his foot. “I’m going to starve!”

“Dramatic,” Valkyrie punches him in the arm and the elder by a few months hisses at her, slapping her arm back. Valkyrie goes to hit him back and Minho rolls his eyes, going up and picking up the woman. Odin laughs as she hisses and shrieks profanities to Minho but he doesn’t listen. He puts her down in the foyer and she stares at him before deciding not to hit him back.

“You’re literally married to Hyunjin and you think Jeongin is dramatic?” Minho raises a brow at her. Odin bends down to Jisung’s height. “Do they not get along... or?” He asks as they watch the two bicker in the distance. Valkyrie pushes Minho out of the foyer and he almost falls on his butt outside. Jisung stifles a laugh.

“Oh no,” Jisung laughs softly. “They’re really good friends but they both have the same temper. Valkyrie knows when to back off with him,”

“Huh,” Odin huff in amusement. “I’ve never met anyone with a temper like my girl’s... nor a person that can make her back down,”

“Minho is scary when he’s angry,” Felix tells him when he walks past with Chan by his side. Odin cackles out a laugh. “Valkyrie... she laughs at big cats when she shoots them with a single arrow... I don’t know what’s scarier?” Jisung pipes up and Felix lifts a brow.

“You were unconscious most of the time he spent being constantly angry,”

“Pretty horrifying experience,” Changbin adds. “I volunteered to spare with him at that time,” his grimace is enough to tell them it didn’t go too well.

“Well, he’s a good dad. And he’s very sweet.” Jisung smiles and Eunbyul starts to squirm in his hold. “Dad?” Odin frowns. “I remember you saying—”

“Things change,” Jisung shrugs and hops onto the camel laying down to wait for a rider. Minhø gets on behind him and Jisung sits Eunbyul in front of him, holding her to his chest.

“What a strange looking horse...” he hears Odin gasp as their camel stands. “Much taller. Valkyrie! Ride with me!”

“I see most fathers are fools for their daughters,” Jisung sings and Minhø huffs. “You can’t talk,” Eunbyul babbles loudly when the camel takes a step. Her eyes fly to all the different colours and sounds she can hear.

Last time they made this trip, they’d been kicked out of the grand palace that looms ahead in the distance. Valkyrie and Odin are chatting together and Eunbyul is excitedly bouncing on Jisung’s thighs. She’ll probably wear herself out quickly and be quiet at the dinner, which Jisung thinks might just go down better than having her screaming.

Jisung’s predictions become true as soon as they dismount off the camels. She’s still in his hold and Jisung knows within the next hour she’ll be asleep.

“And this would be the baby you mentioned,” a voice rumbles out and Jisung turns to see Tenebris standing with her arms crossed over her chest. She wears the same clothes she had the last time they saw her, but this time she had fingerless leather gloves hugging her hands.

“Yes,” Minhø answers back and the woman lifts a brow. “I see... why

you were so adamant. A parent will do anything to help their children... and you... your child is caught between this whole mess,”

She's not entirely wrong, but Jisung knows he'll never put Eunbyul in a potentially unsafe position. Jisung's unwavering spirit wasn't just for Eunbyul, though. Of course she's a big reason but he had reason for this all before he even knew of her existence. For the child he once was, hurt and alone in a world of white and needles— he cannot let that boy down. His pain will not be in vain.

“One of the reasons,” he croaks out and he dips his head, turning towards the opening gates of the palace.

“I have never seen such a big building in my life... the great halls of the ancestors does not compare to the size of this...” Odin pauses and gulps at the shining palace. “Absolute beast,” he finishes and Valkyrie pats his back, nodding her head softly.

This is all a big change for everyone. From going to not even knowing of other settlements to being in a foreign place without much information about what its like. Jisung understands their shock. Each time he stepped foot out of the ship when they landed, it was like a whole new world was staring back at him.

These people are sacrificing all they have to fight this threat.

Jisung cradles his daughter in his arms and Minho holds onto his elbow as they walk into the palace once more. Guards welcome them this time with soft smiles and welcoming voices, a stark difference to the stiff tones and golden lassos they copped last time they were

here.

Jisung has only seen a fragment of the grand palace. The throne room and the hallways that lead up to it, decorated with portraits of rulers of the dynasty.

This time, they're lead through a arch way underneath the set of stairs that goes up to the throne room. The arch is heavily decorated, like the rest of the interior and exterior of the palace. Jewels glitter in the sunlight that draws into the room from high windows and the whole palace seems to glitter.

Eunbyul looks around all around her, cooing softly at all the stimulating sights.

The archway leads them through a garden with tall palm trees swaying softly and bright coloured flowers that Jisung can smell as he walks past. A butterfly flutters past and Eunbyul squeaks, trying to catch it in her chubby fists.

Jisung kisses her fist and she leans back against him, mewling quietly. They walk through the gardens until they reach an open space, covered in soft green grass. A structure made of white sandstone stands high, intricately carved and detailed with stones and golden figures at the bases of each pillar. It is open on all four sides and tables are set up beneath its roof, carpets laid between seating and a fountain bubbles in the center.

Palace workers are standing at the back, waiting to go to the kitchens and serve the meals to them.

The three royal women are perched on a raised platform on the left side of the pavilion, sat on decorated rugs with their own sandstone tables in front of them. Queen Malti is between her daughter and her wife, smiling as she talks to them softly.

“This way,” the guard outstretches his hand, gesturing for them to go into the large pavilion.

People are bustling and whisper softly between each other as they near the grand structure and with the noise of voices growing closer, they catch the attention of royals.

“Welcome,” Queen Malti’s voice booms out, reaching all over the pavilion. “If you will all take your seats,” she gestures to the cushioned stairs and Minho pulls out a seat in the front row, closest to the royals. Jisung smiles at him and takes a seat, placing Eunbyul in a more comfortable position in his arms. Minho sits next to him, Fern and Isa beside him and Chan and Felix next to them.

Seungmin, Changbin and Jeongin sit on the table on their left with Odin, Valkyrie and a general from Scalva.

There are three rows of tables facing the royals, each with only six seats positioned in the direction to the royals so nobody has their back turned on them.

Only the people in the front lines and strategics were invited and even with just the crew that is going to play a more hands on role in

this upcoming event, there are sixty tables all together, every single table sitting side people.

Jisung had been worried before that they hadn't gathered much of a force, but now seeing not even half of their force, the unsettled worry in him eases after realising they will be able to overpower The Capitals forces easily with manpower.

"It is a pleasure to be able to house you all in our city," the princess says with a smile. "You will have the chance to gather together and train in our military training facilities in the palace. It will be big enough for us all to train in comfort,"

"We thank you for your great hospitality," Odin's voice booms out. Queen Syra, dressed in a soft pink and deep purple smiles at the large man. "It is only right," she replies and clasps her hands together.

"We have invited you all here to not only discuss future plans and what we will need to do as a team to get ourselves ready to fight for everything this world has, but take this as a chance to get closer and bond with the people we are going to be spending a vast amount of time with over the next few," she pauses briefly. "Months... years. Who exactly knows?"

"This is beautiful," Felix tells her. "Thank you for your grace,"

The royals all smile. "We must soon treat everyone like friends. We must talk to each other comfortably."

"Of course," Fern smiles at the women and Queen Malti eyes her

down. "You are the woman of Mydar," she says and the tall woman dips her head in a nod. "It is nice to see you in person,"

"I must have to say the same," Isa squeezes her wife's hand underneath the table.

Eunbyul spots another butterfly and squeals happily, trying to launch herself off of Jisung's lap to grab the fluttering insect. Jisung grips her around her middle and cradles her to his chest, laughing gently at his baby that's fooled him into thinking she was calming down.

"Oh, we have an especially excited little guest," Queen Syra laughs as she looks at the baby. Her eyes are soft and Eunbyul coos in response.

"What is her name?" Princess Amira pipes up and she doesn't even bother to hide her excitement. "Eunbyul," Jisung tells her with a smile. Minho grips onto her fist that reaches out at nothing and shakes her arm gently. The baby laughs and the princess coos at her while Queen Syra laughs joyfully.

"It has been some time since we've had a baby in the palace. The last time was ten years ago when Princess Amira's lady gave birth to her son," Queen Malti pipes up. "It is pleasant to hear baby laughter,"

"She has lots in her," Jisung muses and kisses her chubby cheek which she giggles at. Like most time Jisung gives her a kiss, she turns and plants her own wet kiss to his mouth. Minho is the first to laugh and soon enough everyone who witnessed her display of affection is bubbling with vibrant laughter. Eunbyul is ecstatic with all the laughter and jumps up and down on Jisung's lap as she laughs loudly.

The palace workers disappeared at some point during their conversation and Eunbyul stares at a lady that places bowls in front of her parents. "Shall I get you little princess something to eat, too?" She asks and Jisung smiles at her. "That would be very helpful," he says and she nods. "Mashed mangoes or rice?"

Jisung recalls how much she enjoyed the sweet mashed bananas earlier this morning so he asks the woman for the mangoes for her. During the wait Eunbyul almost dives headfirst into the bowl of lentils heady with the scent of rich spices. Minho eats a bite and his eyes widen in surprise. He gives Jisung a thumbs up while Isa hums in satisfaction after she takes a bite. Fern and Jisung shake their heads at their partners reactions.

The dinner goes off with a hit. Eunbyul thoroughly enjoys her mangoes and all the attention she gets. Princess Amira and Queen Syra both came down to hold Eunbyul and the princess even tried to feed the baby, but she was too busy smiling the swallow the sweet fruit.

Meals of slow cooked lamb stews and sides of soft bread were served and deserts made from fresh fruit and a variety of florals came last and Jisung discovered his love for fruit and cheese cakes.

Eunbyul is asleep in Minho's arms after spending a few hours interacting with lots of people. Night has fallen now and Jisung doubts she'll wake up any time soon.

Their plans for the training they will begin soon is to form groups judged on each persons skill so they can work on their full potential.

Fern says they have another year or so at most to train and get ready for The Capital. They have enough time to train and get development of a prevention against the disease— that is if the doctors and scientists manage to find something soon.

Jisung doesn't doubt Hyunjin at all. And after the tests he did for him, Jisung is more than confident that Hyunjin will find a lead. And soon at that.

Special units will be made in the next passing days. A team of medics will be organised with Rahkain, Mydar and Sivran doctors and nurses. Weapon masters, blacksmiths, hand to hand combat. People with higher skill sets are to train people hard until they would be able to keep themselves alive in a fight.

As daunting as Jisung knows that is, it has to be done. Without the harsh training they will lose many. That's something they all want to avoid.

Fern holds Eunbyul while Jisung and Minho thank the royals for the dinner and for allowing them to train on the military grounds. Queen Malti responds that it is important they all receive adequate training for them to have the upper hand.

Queen Syra comes to cradle the baby once more, cooing over her pouted lips in sleep and her chubby cheeks. She peaks at Jisung and smiles. "She looks like you," she comments as she passes the baby back to her father. Minho hums softly. The shape of her lips, cheeks and eyes, all Jisung. Her eyes are a lighter colour, hair a few shades lighter than his, a mousy brown instead of inky locks.

Jisung pictures other faces in his mind, the shape of Minhø's eyes, his smile and he gulps.

"Thank you again," Jisung whispers to them with a small bow before they walk through the gardens and the palace now lit by artificial light in the walls and in the high ceilings above them.

"That went well," Minhø says quietly as they exit the palace. "A lot more calmer than the other times we've been here,"

"Somehow I think those times might be more memorable," Jisung muses and Eunbyul fusses in his arms, letting out soft cries. He pats her bottom and she goes quiet, snuggling against his chest. "I think Eunbyul won them all over," Minhø snorts and Jisung bites on his bottom lip, trying to keep his laughter in. "I think so too,"

The camels are still there waiting patiently for them to return. The camel that carried them to the palace nuzzles at Minhø's shoulder before it bends, waiting for them to hop on its back.

Eunbyul doesn't wake the whole way back, but she lets out soft mewling sounds and Minhø laughs when Jisung tells him that she's dreaming and she makes these noises often in sleep. Minhø doesn't wake up to her noises as much as Jisung does, but Jisung swears every single noise she makes wakes him up.

Just as they get to Mother Barbada's home a yelp alerts them and Jisung flinches. Eunbyul fusses but doesn't wake fully. Minhø holds

onto Jisung's hip, looking out for the sudden noise.

"What was that?" Valkyrie hisses out, coming to stand in front of Jisung with her father.

The streets are emptying, the street lights turned off and the colourful billboard lights had turned off at sunset, leaving the city in a soft darkness. Their eyes scan the darkness, floating towards where the camel stables are. They had just come from there but Minhø squints as he sees something moving, a few figures.

Someone is ushering other people to where they stand, but in the darkness no one can make out who it is or what their intentions are.

"Get inside," Minhø hisses out, beginning to push Jisung and their daughter behind walls to keep them safe. But Jisung squints, inching forwards slightly as he does.

He doesn't know exactly why he's the only one that finally makes out the features of the person in the distance, but his lips part and a soft gasp releases from him. Minhø raises a brow and clutches onto him tighter when Jisung makes a move to walk towards the person.

Jisung turns and gives him a soft look. He passes Eunbyul to him and smiles. "It's okay," he tells him as he walks away and towards the figure.

Minhø watches as he runs towards the person and is swept up in a

big hug, his feet lifting from the ground as he holds the persons shoulders tightly.

Mother Barbada comes out to the threshold and lifts her torch, her eyesight getting worse with old age has made it hard for her to see in the dark at all. She raises a brow and points it in the direction of where Jisung is now on the ground, clutching at the persons hands.

When it illuminates their features, Minho lets out a disbelieving laugh.

Hyunjin's eyes twinkle in the light.

And it tells them all one thing why he's here.

They've found a cure.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everybody!! So sorry for the super late update 🙄 Sydney has gone into lockdown and honestly it's so hard and I've been so unmotivated:((im hopefully going to get back on track soon!!

Also!! I have a super awesome editor now!!! You know who you are and thank you so so much I appreciate you so much ☺️💖💖 they're so amazing

Next chapter we've entered the next part of this fic!! I'm so excited for this story and I know you guys are too!! I love u all!!! 💖💖💖💖💖☺️

“You did it,” Jisung laughs, eyes shining in the dim moonlight. Hyunjin nods his head, a smile taking over his face.

“We did,” he confirms and Jisung lets out a hearty laugh.

“I knew it! I knew you would! And so quickly after we left too...”

“I was onto something the night before you left but I didn’t want to say anything in case it was a dead end. Your blood samples held the answer,” Hyunjin laughs.

Jisung looks shocked although he had expected it. “You must’ve been vaccinated against it when you were in the facility because you carry a certain antibody in your blood... something we had never seen before. And your hormonal implant constantly gives you progesterone... which is rather odd. It’s a hormone that releases after ovulation and thickens the lining of the uterus, much in your case. When you don’t get pregnant the progesterone levels drop and you have the reabsorption cycle but your progesterone is much higher than it typically is. It strengthens the uterus as well, a prevention in its own right.” He speaks fast and Jisung stares at him, trying to absorb everything he has said.

Somehow, he understands and it makes sense to him. He laughs at Hyunjin once he’s processed it. “So the vaccine?”

“Being manufactured as we speak.” Hyunjin clicks his fingers and suddenly, the taller man is on the ground, a smaller body pressed on top of him.

“Valkyrie!” He huffs out but then laughs. She struggles back to her feet, staring at him in disbelief.

“You did it!” And then she leaps into his arms. This time Hyunjin isn’t as caught off guard and he catches her, spinning around gleefully.

Her face turns hard as she looks at him. “Why didn’t you tell me?” She hisses out and Hyunjin bites down on his bottom lip just as all their other friends huddle around him, hugging him tightly, screaming the same things at him.

“I didn’t want to let anyone’s hopes up!” He screams over the cheering. “I felt helpless enough whenever I hit a dead-end... I didn’t want to make you guys feel the same.”

“Hyunjin,” Chan pats his friend's shoulder. “We would never. You know we wouldn’t have been disappointed.”

“But surprising you all was quite nice,” Hyunjin adds. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Seungmin tells him. “We only just wanted to support you. Even if it was from afar.” Hyunjin smiles wide at him, and then Valkyrie clears her throat.

“Uhh, if you would excuse us,” she grabs her husband’s wrist and tugs him forward, pulling him away and into Mother Barbada’s inn.

“She’s always very quick to steal him,” Felix muses, and Changbin snorts.

“You’d be the same if it was Chan away for a day,” Felix flushes, and Chan giggles, wrapping his arms around his shoulders from behind.

“And I would, too,” he sings, and Felix grunts, now pulling him away.

“So is this a thing now? Pulling each other inside?” Jeongin snorts and reaches out to grab Jisung but Minho raises a brow and with a huff, he goes to Mother Barbada and hugs her. They laugh at him and the old woman hugs him back with vigour.

“Oh boy, they leave you out in all their couple things!” She pats him on the back and Jeongin pouts as Minho and Jisung go past.

Seungmin and Changbin shrug at each other and pick Jeongin up by his legs and arms, carrying him into the foyer. The younger howls with laughter while Mother Barbada flicks him on the head when Eunbyul’s cries echo down the stairwell.

The sunlight wakes Jisung in the morning.

It turns out well that way. It was arranged so that the first day of training will start the hour after sunrise, which Jisung believes will be in forty minutes or so. Minho groans awake when Jisung shakes him but rises when he feels Eunbyul in her cot, hoping she'll sleep while they get ready.

Fern has already offered to watch her during these training sessions. Isa is joining the training, being a general herself. Queen Syra and Princess Amira have invited Fern and Eunbyul over for lunch—probably just for a cuddle with Eunbyul, but Jisung really can't blame the royal women much at all.

Eunbyul wakes just as they're putting their boots on. She stretches, babbling as Minho picks her up. Jisung kisses her cheek and gets her bag, and then they're out the door.

Fern is very happy to be spending time with Eunbyul again and the baby is too. She reaches her arms out to her when she opens the door, squealing happily. Fern and Isa have the room right next to theirs which makes it even easier for Eunbyul to be babysat during the days they'll be training.

She'll end up coming with them sometimes once things are more in order and organised, but for now, while they have to focus on getting things up and running, it will be too hard for them to take care of her while trying to focus on training others and building up their skills further.

They both kiss her cheeks and she plants sloppy kisses on their faces with a giggle. Fern grabs her hand and makes her wave goodbye to her parents. This time, she doesn't cry when they walk away but she babbles loudly, happy to be with her grandmother after not having been with her for a while.

"That was much easier than I expected," Jisung comments, and Minho agrees. Stepping out into the foyer they see everyone except Hyunjin and Valkyrie.

After five minutes the couple bursts through the doors, hair braided on the sides of their heads and with pink cheeks. They breathe heavily and Jisung knows they woke up late and ran around trying to make it on time.

"Really?" Jeongin groans and facepalms. Hyunjin flushes and Valkyrie arranges her leather corset around her middle so the laced front is actually at her front and not her side.

"Well, we're here now!" Valkyrie chides and Changbin snorts. She grimaces and then Hyunjin breaks out laughing, shaking his head at her.

"Let's just go," Chan shakes his head, but he's laughing softly.

The military grounds are right of the palace, inside the gates but hidden from the public eye. They're behind a high wall of sandstone, and palms are growing on the outer wall, offering a little bit of

shade.

Guards and military personnel are situated around the gates of the grounds, waiting for the mass of people that are coming to be sorted today.

Queen Malti is there too, her face hard as she watches them flood through the gates and into the massive open space.

It stretches on and on, different buildings scattered around the space. Some areas are paved with flat sandstone and others have soft green grass. Jisung isn't sure how the grass is so green when this is the desert, but he doesn't dwell on that for too long. Rows of tables are spread out, different people sitting with a tablet in front of them, a stylus in hand ready for inputting everyone into the system.

Everyone involved in this has to come today to get their name and information down. Fern is coming before lunch to sign herself up and to enter Eunbyul in the system so they can account for her as well.

The loud buzz of a mass of people talking eases when Queen Malti stands before the crowd of people. They watch the queen and her confident strides as she moves closer to them all. Her voice booms when she speaks, powerful, and they all listen to her carefully.

She addresses them and informs them of each table and their corresponding skill, and if they are interested or have any experience in them they are to go to the corresponding table. Everyone except the healers, who will need to focus their attention on their medical skills, is to choose two skills to attend classes for.

Some people translate what the queen is saying into their native languages so the others who don't speak this tongue can understand the information.

There's a table for just about everything. Skills like healing, swordsmanship, strategics, mechanics, spying, and front-line training all have a table.

Minho wanders over to the mechanics table and signs up, writing his name on the screen, entering his date of birth and presses his thumb against a square that takes an image of his thumbprint. The person sitting behind the tablet asks for any other skills, and Minho writes his background in combat, gun handling and captaining a ship in a box. The man gives him a number by his name and with that, he's done.

"That was easy," he tells Jisung with a smile. "I'm meant to go to mechanics first, and since I have enough knowledge in that, I've signed up for the team, but my classes will be on other skills. I'm doing combat and firing training."

Jisung smiles at him and pats his shoulder, then looks around the table. "I don't know where to go," he admits quietly, and Felix pops up behind him.

"What about the combat training and the firing?" he asks him, and Jisung purses his lips.

"That might work."

Changbin slings an arm over Jisung's shoulders. "I'm going to sign up for the spies and combat," he smiles. Minho laughs and nods his head.

"You'll fit right in," he's always been quick and stealthy. It fits him well. "You guys have insight in the Institution, so maybe you can add that and maybe get some spy training as well."

"I don't think I'm cut out to be a spy," Jisung giggles, but he thanks his friend, who waves excitedly as he bounds over to his chosen skill.

"Could you imagine?" Minho snorts and rubs his arms gently.

"I don't think I even can," Jisung laughs back. "I think we should go for combat training... and second class firing?"

"Same as me, then," Minho muses.

Chan and Jeongin sign up for the same classes as them and Seungmin joins the combat and the strategics courses. Isa goes for the strategics and firing ones as well. Hyunjin joins the medics, but since he's completed his study and has a license, he will help teach classes instead of participating in them. In his free time, he'll join the combat team to practice.

The combat classes quickly become the most popular. Valkyrie joins

them as well as her father and many others. She signs up for the handheld weapons training as well. Those classes correlate with the combat lessons but will focus on more precision with many weapons.

By the time they've signed up, it's lunchtime and the palace staff have set up a serving station underneath a pavilion where a class will be held in the next few days. People that have finished their sign-ups get fed first and slowly people who are at the back of their lines come to eat before returning.

Fern and Eunbyul show up after Jisung has finished eating. Eunbyul is asleep in Fern's arms as she signs up for the strategics team and the courses on how to fly and captain a ship. Eunbyul's thumb is scanned to have her in the system but since she's a baby, that's all she needs to have done.

Fern waves goodbye after that and heads towards the palace. Jisung smiles as he watches her walk up to the doors of the palace, slowly waking Eunbyul by peppering soft kisses on her cheeks.

Minho is hugging him from behind underneath the shade of a tree as they wait for the next set of instructions. Minho kisses the skin near his ear softly, thumbs rubbing circles against his hip bones.

That's when he sees a small figure moving through the crowd, her face tear-streaked as she struggles between the larger adults around her. She's trying to get through the crowd surrounding the combat teams table and Jisung tenses in Minho's hold.

"Jaein?" He calls out, a frown marring between his brows. His sister

looks around, trying to find who called out her name but she fails to see him standing off to the side. “Your sister?” Minhø lets go of him and Jisung moves into the crowd, shimmying towards her.

He places a hand on her shoulder and she jumps, turning towards him. Her eyes are big and full of tears. “Jaein, what are you doing here?” She shuffles closer to him and Jisung feels Minhø’s hand settle on the base of his back. She cries out and Jisung bends down and lifts her up, placing her on his hip. Minhø moves the crowd out of their way and they rush to the spot under the shade of the palm trees.

She’s a lot heavier than Jisung expected and is used to, but he bends down and puts her back on the ground, sitting next to her with Minhø on her other side. He wipes away her tears with his fingers and she moves towards him until she’s practically sitting on his lap, her head buried in his chest. Minhø stares at him with saddened eyes and Jisung only shrugs, his brows knitted together in concern.

If she’s here, it means her father is too.

“I followed dad,” she mumbles out. “But I lost him and I can’t find him.”

The crowds are large. Jisung doubts even if they looked for him they wouldn’t find him anytime soon.

“How about you stay with us until the crowd gets smaller and we try to find him then?” Jisung suggests and his sister ponders in deep thought. “Okay,” she agrees with a soft nod. She reaches for Jisung’s hand and grabs it with her small sweaty palm.

“Who are you?” Jaein frowns softly at Minho and he smiles softly at her.

“Jisung’s... boyfriend,” he pauses trying to think of the right word. He’s not exactly his boyfriend, they never really bothered with labels but he supposes he is. Jaein looks between them and then smiles.

“My name is Minho,”

“My name is Jaein!” she chirps. “Jisung is my brother,” she bounces excitedly.

The crowds slowly dissolve while the three of them talk and play games with Jaein to keep her busy. Felix finds them and joins in keeping her occupied and her mind off her father. Valkyrie bounces over as well and Jaein latches herself onto the woman, asking her many questions about where she’s from, what’s that on her lip and how she got her scar.

Jisung tenses when she asks, worried how Valkyrie will take it but she conjures up a big story and tells her how she gained the new scar. Jaein stares at her, mesmerised by her.

To Jisung’s surprise, Fern comes back with Eunbyul who’s now awake and cooing loudly, squirming happily in her arms.

Jaein watches as Fern drops her back off. The older woman mutters an apology, needing to attend a meeting that concerns affairs back in Mydar.

Eunbyul dives for the grass and Jisung snorts as he puts her down on the soft grass and she instantly tries to eat it. Minho grabs her and fishes out the grass between her tight fingers. Jaein watches her from Valkyrie's lap.

She babbles loudly and grabs Minho's face. She giggles loudly and Minho tilts his head down and she kisses the tip of his nose.

Jaein looks at Jisung. "Who's baby is that?" She reaches out to poke the baby's cheek and Eunbyul's turns to her, legs kicking happily. Jaein giggles at her and leans closer to her.

"Ours," Jisung says, gesturing to Minho and himself. Jaein looks at them.

"You're both boys," she says plainly and Jisung hums.

That just confirms her parents hadn't told her the details of what happened to him.

She doesn't ask anything else but gets distracted by playing with Eunbyul.

Jisung spots him not long after that, talking to someone while he scans his surroundings. Jaein had said he didn't know she followed him, so he couldn't be looking for her. Jisung clenches his jaw when he realises Youngho is looking for him, trying his luck to find him again.

He doesn't know how many times he has to explain to him that he wants nothing to do with him. He just won't give up.

"Jaein," he calls to her and points to the man. She smiles and stands and takes off in a run but she halts suddenly, frowning as she turns back to Jisung. "Why aren't you coming too?"

Jisung tries his best to smile at her. "I have to go home with my family, too," he tells her.

"Oh," her brows knit together. "But you're my family too?"

He pauses and wets his lips. Felix rubs the small of his back comfortingly. "I," he gulps the lump in his throat.

"Yes," he tells her with a soft smile. "You're my family, too."

→

“Well,” Minho struggles to hold the squirming baby in his hold as they enter their room. “That went pretty smoothly.”

“I guess so,” Jisung grabs her and lays her on the bed that Minho slept in last month. It stays empty now. They rather sleep together, kept warm by each other’s body heat and comforted by the sound of each other’s heartbeats.

“Jaein is cute,” Minho says and Jisung hums.

“She loves Valkyrie,” Jisung muses softly. “

She is pretty cool, I can’t blame her,” he adds and Minho scoffs but then he laughs.

They bathe Eunbyul and feed her a bottle before they put her down for bed. She babbles for a few minutes before she’s quiet.

Isa and Fern come in to tell them that dinner’s ready and Minho takes the little bassinet basket that Mother Barbada gifted them after the dinner at the palace last night. It comes in handy when they need to leave the room while she’s sleeping.

Minho carries her in the weaved basket with a soft feather mattress.

Mother Barbada is thrilled when she spots the baby sleeping in the basket and watches her all of dinner, brushing the baby's soft cheeks with her worn fingers.

For the next three days, it is calm in the City of Sivra.

They all have free time while the classes are sorted and schedules are finalised. Mother Barbada takes them to a water hole inside the city during their first day and Eunbyul absolutely loves it. Not many other people are there but Jisung is sure many people can hear Eunbyul's excited squeals very clearly.

The second day is spent by Hyunjin checking up on Eunbyul and having a picnic at lunchtime where Jisung and Minho first kissed.

Jisung flushes when Minho grabs him and kisses him again. Their friends whoop and Changbin pats Minho on his shoulder, laughing when they pull apart. Eunbyul is laughing loudly and she claps her hands together. Jisung stares at her with wide eyes.

"Do that again!" He cheers. "Quick, Minho, kiss me again!" He pulls him and Minho almost trips over his own feet when Jisung yanks him towards himself. They kiss again and Eunbyul claps again.

"Oh, my," Mother Barbada laughs out loud and picks up the baby, spinning her around. Her giggles float around in the air.

The picnic goes well until Eunbyul sits up by herself and falls face-

first into the rose pastry Jisung was about to eat. She cries, trying to wipe the sticky filling off. Minho can't help but laugh at her while Jisung punches him all while trying to calm her down as Felix flies to get a damp cloth to clean her up with.

"Oh, it happens to the best of us," Minho pats her cheeks and her pout lessens a bit, her little cries quiet to soft mewling.

On the third day, Valkyrie exits her room looking ecstatic while Hyunjin trails after her.

Jisung gasps and Eunbyul turns her head to look at him. The taller is pouting, on his bottom lip a silver ring that matches his wife's.

"How the hell did that happen?" Minho gapes at his friend.

"She asked if I wanted to get it done when we were here last... I wasn't expecting her to get a ring made and pierce just like that!"

"Does it hurt?" Seungmin asks while trying to keep in a laugh.

"Not really. When she did it first I think I screamed."

"So that's what that noise was," Minho muses and Jisung sighs. "You woke Eunbyul up."

“Damn, was I that loud?”

It's peaceful for those three days. It's almost as if they've forgotten what awaits them all. Jisung thinks they all deserve a break after just a long time. They never really stopped before this just to have fun. It feels nice to be able to bond like this again.

But their break is only so long and when they wake up on the fourth day, they leave to go back to the military grounds to begin their first classes.

Jisung is a bundle of nerves as he had expected. He hopes they're in classes together. And that his goddamn father hadn't signed up for the same classes and somehow end up having to train by his side. Jisung can only hold himself back for so long.

When they arrive, they're told to group into their main class and wait for their schedules.

Most of them go to the combat class area where the table was three days ago and Changbin skips happily away to the spies, beaming and waving at his friends from across the grass. Seungmin goes to the strategics and is settled by Fern.

Eunbyul is with Mother Barbada who's also helping out in the administration. She has a long history in that type of work and most of the city knows her. Jisung felt a little guilty that she's looking after his baby but the old woman was overjoyed and asked if she could take her today.

Slowly, their names are called and they go up to the two people standing in front of a table with piles of paper.

They all get their papers one after another, probably since they lined up one after another.

The announcers have some difficulty with most of their names but not enough for them to not recognise that it's their name being called.

“Ooh, paper!” Valkyrie cheers happily as she grips her schedule.

“I was starting to think paper wasn’t a thing,” Jisung muses and shakes his schedule around so it makes a whooshing noise. Minho snorts at him.

“Can you read yours?” Minho asks him and Jisung narrows his eyes at the paper. “It’s all in our language at least,” Minho says. There are volunteer translators from each settlement helping people make out the language.

Jisung scans his eyes over the page.

“Com... combat 1AC... firing 2F.” He makes sure those are the only ones he can see and then he nods. Minho smiles.

“I have the same.”

“Me too!” Felix sings. “So does Valkyrie.”

“And me and Jeongin,” Chan adds as he slings an arm over Felix’s shoulders.

“And once a week ME5...” Jisung frowns. “What’s that?”

“Mandatory evaluation,” Hyunjin says as he rests his chin on top of Valkyrie’s head. “It’s just to see what you’re at and if there’s anything the classes need to add.”

“Oh,” Jisung hums. “I guess that makes sense.”

Luckily, they’ve put them all in the same classes. Even Changbin is in their combat class. Hyunjin is running medical classes around the clock but is to join their class as much as he possibly can.

They’re then called into their classes for their first lesson.

Jisung laughs in surprise when he recognises the woman standing at the front of their class’s line. Her smile is soft as she gazes over them all. “It’s Cala,” Jisung whispers to his friends. The woman that brought them in from the desert and led them to Mother Barbada.

Her stance is strong as she looks over her class and Jisung is glad that

he can finally thank her properly.

She finally sees them in the crowd and recognition floods over her face. She smiles wide and ventures towards them.

“My, oh my,” she whispers and then chuckles. “What a fond surprise to have you all in my class.”

“We are very grateful we’re in your class,” Jisung says. “We never got to thank you properly before, so thank you.”

“Oh, don’t mention it,” Cala waves him off. “I did what I must and I’m glad to see you all safe and unharmed,” her eyes linger on Valkyrie. “You look much better than when I first saw you,”

“I must admit I don’t remember that encounter at all,” Valkyrie says shyly. Minho lifts a brow at her and her lips purse at him.

“I’m not surprised. I hope we can all grow together.” She turns to the front of the class again. “Now, class, we’re to train on the grass fields today. Hand to hand combat so pick a partner and let’s go!”

Another three people come with her, dressed in the same light coloured wraps around their bodies. Since the classes are still large, it only makes sense that there be more than one instructor. Cala seems to be the main teacher, though.

Minho raises a brow at Jisung but he laughs and jumps into Felix's hold, smiling slyly at him. Minho looks at him, betrayed and can do absolutely nothing when Valkyrie tackles him, gripping him by his ear and dragging him along.

They go through some basic drills that they had covered before when Chan started teaching them fighting in Mydar.

Valkyrie and Minho are a few rows away from Jisung and Felix but they can still see them going at it with more energy than anyone else. Jisung thinks it might've been a mistake for those two to be together but Felix shrugs at him and they get back to what they're doing.

The people in this class have experience in fighting so they skip the basics and go into more techniques and defence skills.

By the time the class is over, Jisung is panting from both wearing darker colours in the sun and having to keep up with the sudden cardio.

He drags his feet along the grass when the class is dismissed. Mother Barbada is underneath a smaller pavilion with cool water dispensers around her and Eunbyul crawling around in the grass. She's keeping a keen eye on her to make sure she doesn't eat the grass. Jisung gets a cool drink before he talks to Mother Barbada and finally goes to say hi to Eunbyul. He lies under the shade of the pavilion and she crawls over to him before climbing on top of him and lying on his stomach.

"Hello to you too," he bops her nose and she giggles, snuggling against his chest. Jisung relaxes in the shade for a few minutes until

Minho comes over with Valkyrie, still fighting with her until Hyunjin comes in between them and slings Valkyrie over his shoulder and flicks his friend's forehead. Minho yelps and Jisung sighs loudly at them.

Eunbyul doesn't make any noise and Jisung notices she's fallen asleep on him.

Seungmin and Jeongin trudge back, cheeks red and sweaty. Changbin and Chan take their time, lost in conversation, but they look totally fine. Jisung reminds himself they've worked up their stamina for years and that they, Minho and Valkyrie are the strongest in their team.

"One class down," Felix mutters as he sits down next to Jisung.

It's a little daunting to be at this point. Getting prepared for the inevitable revolution that looms in the future.

Jisung had wanted this so bad. He does want this.

But he can see it now, and it's not just a haze of hatred.

The Capital will fall.

It will. And he will watch as it collapses right beneath his feet.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm so sorry for the late updates! It definitely will not be happening again!

Jaein... I honestly feel so bad for her and Jisung is so conflicted about it all

This arc is honestly quite fun and i had a lot of fun writing it!! Thank you everyone for sticking with me for this long!!!! <33

He ducks the punch that he just saw in time. He narrowly misses his fist colliding against his face.

He spins out of the way, his feet flicking up sand as he moves.

“Faster!” Cala calls out her command and Hyunjin gives Jisung a pained look at their teacher’s instruction.

So Jisung moves quicker, spins behind his taller friend and before Hyunjin can process where he’s gone, he swipes a leg over the back of his knees and knocks him to the ground. He drops his weight onto his back, though careful to not hurt him intentionally.

Hyunjin moans as he spits out a mouthful of sand and grass. Soft cheering erupts and sudden applause makes Jisung look up and search for the person clapping for them.

Cala is smiling wide near them and Jisung rolls off of Hyunjin, jumping back to his feet and helping Hyunjin up from his position on the ground.

“You have improved quickly,” Cala muses. “I am very impressed with your progress. Hyunjin, you are good as well. Though, we all know where your true talent lies.”

“Thank you?” Hyunjin whispers as he brushes himself off. Cala had been very impressed when she found out he is one of the medical team’s teachers and that he’s as skilled as he is at such a young age.

Jisung pats his friend on the back and smiles widely. “That was a good session!”

“You’re only saying that because you didn’t eat grass!” Hyunjin cries back and Jisung laughs loudly at the dismay across his face. Minh bounds over with Chan hot on his tail. The two friends had teamed up a few classes ago after Minh and Valkyrie were separated due to them both being unwilling to let the other win. Cala had been amused at first and happy with their enthusiasm but after a few classes, she grew concerned that they would interrupt the class and not improve.

Minh tackles Jisung in a hug and Chan laughs loudly as Hyunjin pouts.

“Good job! I saw that from the other side of the arena!” Chan gives him applause as Minh speaks excitedly.

“Well,” Hyunjin clears his throat as he smoothes down his white shirt now covered in grass stains. Mother Barbada will fuss over him for sure when they go back home and he’ll have to explain all over again how his small friend tripped him into eating grass. Hyunjin grimaces and Jisung holds back a laugh.

"I have to go teach now," he grumbles and Minho laughs at him, pointing at his shirt.

"Your students are going to ask questions," he sings and Hyunjin narrows his eyes at him.

"My students are respectful people, thank you very much," he hisses back. "It might be surprising, Minho, but not everyone is an asshole like you."

Minho places a hand on his chest, feigning hurt. "Oh, I am so offended," he cries out and Hyunjin rolls his eyes at him, done with his friend's teasing antics.

"Goodbye!" He says as he turns and jogs away.

"Do you think he'll set Valkyrie on me later?" Minho chuckles and Jisung nods without a second thought. Hyunjin wouldn't ask her outright to come cause Minho havoc but he has a habit of ranting and Valkyrie has this urge to protect him. Even if it meant getting into Minho's hair.

"We're locking the doors tonight," Minho concludes. Jisung snorts.

"We always lock the doors,"

"Shhh," Minho presses a finger to his mouth. Jisung looks at him

with wide eyes. “If any of them find out do you know how much we’ll hear?”

“Maybe you deserve it,” Jisung laughs loudly and Minho deflates at his words.

“Sometimes I think you’re the meaner one.”

“You ask for it,” Jisung hums and Jeongin zooms by, Valkyrie chasing after him, laughing loudly. She catches up to him and Jisung laughs as she jumps on Jeongin, tackling him to the ground.

“She has boundless amounts of energy,” Cala says from behind them and Jisung nods his head slowly. “She is a good warrior,” she continues and then turns to Chan. “And you,” the eldest stiffens a little bit.

Chan’s always been uncomfortable when attention is turned on him. Jisung sees him gulp and how he stretches his spine straighter as she smiles at him. “You are very good. I have never trained or heard of such raw talent at such a young age... tell me, when did you learn how to fight?”

Chan shuffles in his spot and they notice. Minho walks over and slings an arm over his friend’s shoulders, offering support but also helping him accept the compliment that everyone knows he’ll turn down as soon as he opens his mouth.

“Fourteen,” Minho says. “I was thirteen and Changbin was twelve,” Cala raises her brows.

“That is rather young to begin training,” she says.

“Not professionally or anything,” Chan cuts in. “Not guard training or things like that,” she waits for them to continue talking. “Where we came from... it...” Chan gulps. “It was needed if we wanted to survive. I fought in underground rings from when I was sixteen... not anything real.”

Cala shakes her head at him. “It was real,” she smiles before she gives a small bow of her head and heads back to the front of the arena, dismissing the class.

Chan blinks and then scratches at his nape. “Well... we don’t have any other classes now.”

“Nope,” Minho slides his arm off Chan after giving him a gentle pat on the back.

“Hyunjin said that the scientists and doctors from Rahka are coming with the vaccines today in the late noon. We could help get a clinic set up so we can get admission rates faster?” Seungmin pipes up and everyone seems to agree.

“We should talk to Hyunjin and Mother Barbada to see if they have any recommendations. Hyunjin needs to tell us how much space we

need,” Jeongin says, shaking off the grass and sand in his hair.

“I can quickly catch up and ask him,” Changbin says before he hurries off. “Let’s meet back at Mother Barbada’s!” He calls behind him as he runs in the direction Hyunjin had gone.

→

Mother Barbada stands in the foyer of her home and stretches her arms out, her cooking spoon in her left hand as she sings out a ‘tada!’

The foyer is large and covered, points Hyunjin had said were important. There’s enough space in the large, open room for many stations to be set up for quicker admissions. The wall that holds in soil for all the plants circling the perimeter of the creates a calm atmosphere and maintains a good temperature throughout the day.

“I have a few tables that we can set up here,” Mother Barbada speaks. “I don’t have much use for them right now.”

“That works out,” Seungmin smiles and the older woman nods.

“Come, my children, you will have to carry them for me,” she ushers them up to the large wooden doors and leads them into a shed in the garden at the side of the main house where they’re all staying for the

time they're in The City of Sivra.

Minho and Chan carry out the largest table, a collapsable wooden table that's as lengthy as the dining table that sits all of them and ten more when it's set up properly. Seungmin and Jisung carry out a similar table that is smaller and weighs less. There are five more tables that are the same size as the one Jisung and Seungmin carried out to the foyer.

Two tables are set up near the fountain in the centre of the room, far enough away so it's comfortable for nurses behind the table to move around freely, but far enough off the path so it doesn't obstruct any line formations.

The largest table is set up closest to the steps leading up to the door to the house and three of the smaller tables are scattered around the circular path.

"Now," Mother Barbada dusts off her hands after pulling out cobwebs from the joints in the tables. "I suspect we will need chairs—lots of them," she claps her hands and turns up the stairs, calling out to them as she hurries through the doors.

Fern comes by the corridor that leads up to the threshold of the home holding Eunbyul in her arms as they hurry past with stacks of chairs in their grip. "Oh," she frowns at the sight of them struggling to see where they're walking. "Do you need help?" She calls out and Jisung turns, giving her a small grimace, and that's enough for Fern to know that help sounds fantastic to him.

She scurries back into the house, calling out from the bottom of the stairwell.

Her wife, Odin and a few of his men and Nic all come out ready to help.

“What a system,” Isa applauds them when she carries down more chairs and drops the stack in front of Minho. He smiles at her.

“For the vaccinations,” he says. “The scientists and doctors will arrive later today and we want it to be as efficient as it possibly can be.”

“Seems like it’ll work out well. It’s pretty organised already,” Isa pats him on his back and Fern steps down with Eunbyul who squirms out of her arms. She bends and places her on the ground. Eunbyul crawls around for a little bit on the hard surface before she decides she doesn’t like it and cries out. Jisung responds first and picks her up, patting her back as her cries lessen.

“Hyunjin finishes his class soon,” Valkyrie says after checking the clock above the fountain. “So if he approves then we know we’ve done well.”

Hyunjin comes back twenty minutes later blinking in shock as he takes in the room around him. “You guys really weren’t playing around,” he mutters.

“When do we?” Jeongin sasses with his hands on his hips, his mouth

in a thin line. Hyunjin rolls his eyes at him and Jisung snorts.

He clicks his tongue and then nods his head. "This is really good though. And close to the accommodations, which is a big plus for everyone who's going to be working here."

They saved the empty wing of Mother Barbada's inn for the scientists and doctors that will be arriving shortly.

"Do we need to set up anything else?" Changbin asks Hyunjin. The doctor shakes his head.

"This is all good. If anyone needs a break after the vaccine we can always take them to the garden to calm down. Some people don't do so well with needles," Changbin screws his nose up in dismay and Hyunjin pats his back. Felix and Jisung are too used to needles, like Jeongin and Seungmin who also barely flinch at them or the thought of them.

Constant needles had desensitised them from them.

"If you guys accept it... can we vaccinate you again just to make sure?" Hyunjin asks, turned to his three friends. Jeongin pumps his fist, happy he doesn't require one anymore.

"I'm okay with that," Felix shrugs and Jisung nods his head in agreement.

“Go for it,” Seungmin says as calm as the other two.

“Okay,” Hyunjin nods his head. “That’s settled then.”

“But... Hyunjin, does Eunbyul need to have one?” Jisung speaks up and the young doctor gazes at him.

“You said your friend died when she was seven,” he whispers. “I want to... but the choice is yours.”

“She needs it,” Jisung speaks without a second thought. “I can’t risk it.”

“Okay,” Hyunjin agrees. “It won’t cause her any harm but I can’t promise she won’t cry,” Jisung pats her back.

“She’ll be okay,” Minho speaks up. “I was there for her first shots. She won’t cry for too long,”

Mother Barbada makes them all a cool, sweet drink after they’re all set up, and just after they’ve all finished, Hyunjin gets a message from a caller device that Rahka had given him before he left to inform everyone about their success.

“Rava’s here. Their ship is with the rest and they’re calling for help to

get the boxes of doses out.”

“Well,” Minho jumps to his feet and rolls out his shoulders. “They called the right place. Let’s go, team!”

→

Ten scientists and forty doctors just fit in the empty parts of Mother Barbada’s inn. The boxes of vaccine doses are almost endless, and Jisung is hopeful that they’ll have enough to vaccinate everyone against the deadly disease.

The doctors are happy with the setup and the scientists are happy they can finally relax and start their own training. Most of them are to look over things and make sure nothing goes wrong, and if there’s something that needs to be researched, their ship is also capable of becoming a lab.

Felix gets the vaccine first after Hyunjin explains that it’s completely safe and that all the female scientists have already gotten the vaccine to prove its safety. He doesn’t flinch when it’s injected and he smiles at his friends. Jisung goes after him, with Eunbyul on his lap. They pull up the charts they filled and get his details and enter the vaccine data on it. A representative from the palace comes with data of their own residents so they are viable to have the vaccine as well.

Jisung goes first and Eunbyul watches with curious eyes. “I’ll make it extra quick,” the woman says, tickling Eunbyul’s side. Jisung feels

Minho's hand settle on his shoulder, offering his support as well.

Eunbyul frowns at first and then she cries after the needle is already out. Jisung hugs her and rocks her for a few minutes until she calms, pouty and patting her arm where the circular bandaid is.

Hyunjin does Valkyrie's vaccine and the woman screws her nose up at it, confused by the odd feeling it causes in her arm. "All done," he sticks the bandaid on and gives her a kiss which she sighs against. Hyunjin laughs against her mouth and gently pushes her away. Isa bounds over to him and offers her arm right away.

"You're keen," Hyunjin chuckles and Isa winks.

"You have done wonders, Hyunjin," she says. "I am very proud of you," her eyes shine at him and Hyunjin smiles at the older woman with pride shining in his own orbs at her praise.

Everyone who requires the vaccine in Mother Barbada's home is vaccinated in just an hour and they pack up their equipment and store it in a locked shed near where they got the tables and chairs.

Mother Barbada scurried off after she got her vaccine to begin cooking dinner and Valkyrie followed her along with Seungmin and Jeongin, keen to help the woman and enjoy all the affection she'll no doubt shower them with.

Felix takes Eunbyul who's much happier now and Chan follows him,

playing peek-a-boo with Eunbyul from behind Felix's back. The baby laughs loudly and Jisung dismisses himself to go have a shower.

Once he's clean from the day's sweat and dirt from fighting in the outside arena, he goes out to the garden where Chan and Felix are playing with Eunbyul. Minho has gone to shower as well. Eunbyul squeals when she spots him, crawling over to him. Jisung picks her up and spins around, tickling her tummy as she laughs loudly. The four of them play for a little bit until Minho comes down to join in, his hair still slightly damp.

Felix pouts when Eunbyul tries to go to Jisung, thumping at his chest which is her signal that she's hungry.

"If you want to keep her until dinner you can get her bag from Mother Barbada and take care of her if you'd like?" Jisung offers and his friend beams and Chan looks excited to play with her more as well.

"Of course! We're professional babysitters at this point, right Chan?" The eldest gives him a thumbs up and a large smile.

"Go have some time to yourselves. You don't get much of that these days."

The three of them hurry to get Eunbyul a bottle from Mother Barbada in the kitchen.

Jisung turns to Minho. The elder gazes at him with a sly smile.

“No baby,” he says and Jisung hums with a soft nod. “You remember what happened last time she wasn’t with us.” Jisung gulps and heat flares in his body as Minho’s fingers dance down the curve of his spine, settling on his hip.

“I do,” Jisung mutters back.

“Come on,” Minho pulls on his hand. “I have something to show you.”

He leads Jisung into the house, past the kitchen where Valkyrie is signing a song in her native tongue and Mother Barbada is listening to her sweet voice as she stirs something in that great big pot of hers. Chan and Felix are feeding Eunbyul at the table, too absorbed in her cuteness to notice them.

Minho takes him up the stairs, and instead of pulling him into their room like Jisung had thought he would, he turns left where a balcony overlooks the gardens below. Jisung peers at the grass below and finds Fern and Isa dancing together, barefoot and gleaming with joy. The scene warms his heart.

There’s a staircase on the right, small and off to the side. Minho smiles at him and laughs as he hurries up it. Jisung smiles widely and chases after him, crashing against his chest when he reaches the top.

The roof is flat, with a tall barricade made of glittering white stone. Jisung breathes out, his lips pulled into a large smile.

“Woah,” he mutters out. “It’s so beautiful.”

The skyline is soft blue but the sky is bright with colours of pink, purple and bright orange. The sun is a golden orb slowly falling to its bed and the moon is adjacent to it, shining high in the suns dying light.

There are no clouds in the sky, leaving the bright colours shining in Jisung’s eyes. The neon lights from the city below illuminate the sides of buildings, and the golden light from the setting sun casts everything and everyone into molten gold below.

Jisung turns to Minho and his breath catches in his throat. He’s shining in the dimming light, like someone’s lifelong work of art. His fingers creep out and touch his jaw. Minho smiles down at him, those dark brown eyes filled with so much emotion that Jisung suddenly finds it hard to breathe.

“I love you,” he whispers out softly before he leans in and reaches up, connecting their lips in a kiss.

Minho’s hands grip at his waist, hugging him close to his body.

His pulse is rapid beneath his skin and he’s sure Minho can feel his heart in his chest booming with a certain intensity that only he can make him feel.

Minho is the one to pull away and Jisung, craving his touches and the way his body is warm against him, leans in for another kiss. Minho laughs over his mouth and Jisung smiles himself before finally pulling away and breathing in the freshness of the air.

Their foreheads rest against each other's for a few deep breathes until Minho turns away and tugs him close to his side.

"This," he looks out to the horizon where the sun is dipping lower and lower. "This is it." He looks into Jisung's eyes. "Chasing overmorrow. We're doing that and this," he points to the sun. "We will make the world see this. We will have an overmorrow."

"Yes," Jisung breathes out, eyes shining. Those dormant flames erupt at sudden times and Minho can see them now, reflected in his eyes, bright and burning. Ever so destructive but so beautiful and entrancing.

He bites down on his lip and his breath shudders out. "We can do this," he says and Minho knows he's mostly telling himself that. Because it's daunting and scary and all Jisung wants to see is this. The sun rising and falling and he wants that for others.

"We can," Minho says and Jisung bundles him into a hug. "I love you," he tells him over and over again. "I love you so much,"

Tears wet his shirt but Minho only holds him tight and kisses the tears that roll down his cheeks. "I love you," he tells him back and

Jisung smiles, his eyes so soft and beautiful in the gold light. He's everything to Minhø, like air.

"I want you," Jisung mutters and Minhø blinks softly at him. "I want to feel you so badly," his fingers grip at his shoulders, slipping to feel the harsh muscle of his chest. Minhø gulps.

"I've always wanted you," Minhø whispers as his breath brushes against Jisung's neck before he presses a delicate kiss there. Jisung shudders.

"Then have me," Jisung whispers lowly.

He feels as if he's in a haze as they drift down to their room. Minhø locks the door and then grips at Jisung's hips, wasting no time. They kick off their shoes and they thud loudly as they're thrown haphazardly to the ground. They don't care, too lost in each other.

His kisses always leave him with a gnawing ache of need in him, always makes him feel as if he's drinking up the gods' ambrosia.

He's like smoke, clinging and strong, invading every sense of his body until Minhø succumbs to that power, a divinity in his own right.

Jisung lets out a soft sound as his back hits the mattress, warm from hours of sunlight. Minhø stares down at him from between his parted thighs, admiring the light cast over his features, turning him into a carving of pure gold.

He reaches out for him, a hand sliding down his chest, falling lower and lower until Minho shudders at the touch of his palm gliding over his hardening cock. His fingers rise, slipping into his waistband and he pulls his pants down to his knees.

Minho stifles a soft laugh and pulls back only to have Jisung whine at the lack of touch. But he tugs his pants and his underwear off and Jisung stares at him.

There's no barrier of water now and they haven't had the time to indulge in such things because of how busy they are during the days training and at night with their daughter.

Jisung's eyes flicker from his face to his cock, staring at the reddening blunt tip, the girth of him. Jisung lets out a soft sound and Minho looks at him in the eyes as he slips his light blue shirt over his head, leaving him bare in front of his lover.

Jisung sits up on his elbows and watches Minho as he inches near, his own hands pulling at Jisung's pants.

The soft material of his bed shorts slip down his thighs and Minho heaves in a deep breath, pulling him closer to his body. He pulls off his underwear off in one swift movement and Jisung shivers at his sudden bareness. Minho moves up to the bed, sitting on the heels of his feet. His cock pokes against the flesh of Jisung's thigh and he lets out a soft sound as Jisung bites softly on his bottom lip.

Minho's hands wander across his lower belly, lifting his oversized shirt up. Jisung slips it over his head and he squirms gently under his stare.

He trusts Minho. More than anything, but being so bare, stripped of clothing that hides his body that reminds him of other days— it's a weakness he still has trouble with.

But Minho stares at him as if he's descended from the skies— like he's some type of god. Jisung marvels at his gaze. The elder's fingers trace over the iridescent stretch marks across his lower stomach, his hips, his inner thighs and Jisung shudders beneath his touch.

"If you ever want to stop," Minho speaks out, his voice deep. Heat flares through Jisung at the low timbre. "Just tell me," he then kisses him and their cocks knock against each others'. Jisung whimpers at it and hooks his legs around the elder's waist.

"I don't want to stop,"

Minho gazes deep into his eyes. "If you change your mind later on, tell me."

Jisung nods his head and then Minho pulls away. Jisung sits up, reaching for him but Minho doesn't go far. Instead, he reaches into the first draw of the bedside table and pulls out two things.

Jisung blinks at him and relaxes when he realises what it is.

He watches him climb back on the bed and he kisses him, one hand trailing over his side, cupping his hip and up to his chest where his fingers brush over his erect nipple. The other hand comes to prod at his thighs, parting them further and Minho looks into his eyes as his fingers press against him, slowly applying pressure until one finger slips into him. He blinks, a breath escaping him as he slowly moves his finger.

“You tell me,” Minho says. “When you want another,” Jisung tips his head back and asks for the second. The moment he adds another finger, Jisung is biting down on his lip at the initial burn but it eases rather quickly and fades into an odd sensation but Jisung thinks he likes it.

When he adds the third finger, Jisung throws his head back, eyes shutting as Minho’s thick fingertips brush past something inside of him. He lets out a loud noise, something high in his throat and he hears Minho chuckle. He grips at his thigh, parting his legs even further apart. Jisung reaches out a hand and grips his shoulder.

“One more?” Minho asks and Jisung nods his head blindly. The stretch hurts a little more, but Jisung has felt much worse before. It fades again and Minho brushes against that place twice before he suddenly pulls out.

Jisung whines at the emptiness and he opens his eyes to stare at Minho. The elder has a soft smile on his lips, adoration shining so brightly in his eyes as he rolls the condom down his hardened length.

He shudders in anticipation and Minho leans over him, capturing his lips in a kiss. The last bit of sunlight is shining into Jisung's eyes and he has to squint through the molten gold light that leaks through the window.

Minho stares down at him, his breath halting at the sight of him. Pink flushed cheeks, lips red and swollen from kisses, his hair soft and glowing in the light. Minho gulps hard and holds onto his hips, steadying himself as he slowly pushes himself into Jisung.

The hands on his hips are steady and firm, and Jisung melts underneath the touch. Minho gazes down at him, his bottom lip caught between his teeth. Jisung reaches for his shoulders, panting loudly.

"Good?" Minho asks him, breathless and Jisung nods, his mouth falling open as Minho pushes himself further in. A strangled noise erupts from Jisung and then he's gripping harder on Minho's shoulders, a loud moan erupting from him as he finally pushes all the way in. Minho groans, his head falling next to Jisung's own.

"Kiss me, god, kiss me," Jisung fumbles out, his hands cupping at Minho's cheeks to hurriedly press their lips together.

He holds onto him tightly as they kiss and Minho moves his hips slowly, softly, and Jisung moans into his mouth, unable to keep his eyes open, losing himself in pleasure he's never felt before.

His fingers dig into Minho's back as his hips slowly thrust and a choked sound comes out from Jisung just as he angles his hips

differently. He smiles and kisses him again as he pulls out, only to slam back into him a little rougher than before. Jisung responds to it loudly, pulling him closer and locking his legs around his waist.

“Breathe, Sungie,” Minho pants out and then groans loudly. Jisung gasps out, back arching at the stronger thrusts. Sweat beads along their skin and Minho is lost in the trance of Jisung, drunk on him entirely. The smoke is heady in his nostrils, making him think nothing but of the golden illuminated figure beneath him.

Minho holds him as he shifts their position a little bit, so he’s on his knees, Jisung’s hips off the bed. He holds his hips and Jisung claws at his shoulders, desperate for some leverage as he falls deep into pleasure.

His hips begin to move, meeting Minho’s movements and soon their movements become more erratic, less thought out, the steady rhythm Minho had made gone, lost as pleasure tips them over the edge.

Minho’s movements become faster and faster until he suddenly stills, head tipped back as warmth floods his body, paralysing his spine at the overwhelming pleasure of his release. Jisung whimpers at the sudden warmth but Minho wraps his hand over Jisung’s aching cock while he moves his hips again, hissing through the overstimulation but Jisung’s spine then curves and he explodes, a loud noise escaping his throat as he releases over his chest.

He breathes heavily and Minho flops down next to him, his breathing heavy. He hugs him tightly against his chest, kissing him softly.

“I love you,” Jisung mutters gently.

Minho kisses him and smiles. “I know,” he mutters back. “And I love you, my fireheart.”

Notes for the Chapter:

I... I honestly have only once read over this chapter and I screamed and cried ngl... that was the first true smut scene I've written and uhh idk it probably shows I'm sorry lol

Also im trying my best with updates but I've been given this really awesome opportunity with my art and it's super exciting!! It's taking up my time and ive graduated now although we're still in lockdown atm :(I've started a course for something else though hehhe

Time flies in The City of Sivra.

Weeks go by of training, of evaluations. Chan had been called to fight against Cala in his most recent evaluation and had gained respect throughout the city when he'd won the match in minutes.

Changbin has made friends in his spy training and has grown in skill until he moves like a shadow, unseen and stealthy. Seungmin is thoroughly enjoying his classes in statistics and he had dragged Jisung to one lesson after speaking to the teacher informing him that it was Jisung's idea that started this whole thing.

Minho has been called to mechanic classes to fix little things and make sure the ships are still in good condition. Hyunjin and Valkyrie have been busy managing the vaccines, but over the few weeks, they've almost got everyone vaccinated. Even the citizens that aren't going to The Capital, but for safety measures, they thought it was necessary. Jeongin and Felix have been absorbed in the firing lessons and they've quickly become the highest of the class, their shots accurate and swift.

With weeks passing, months go by and Eunbyul is to turn one in a few weeks. Jisung cries at the thought of her growing up so he tries his best to distract himself from the thought.

The strategic team listen to his first plans that have slowly been evolving. The people in the room are all geniuses and Jisung listens to them all, adding his own points that they ponder over and actually take into consideration.

They had asked him to swap his firing class to join the strategics instead. Jisung feels a little uneasy joining since he can't read or write well and the written out plans make zero sense to him and he needs it to be verbally told to him. Seungmin promises he won't let him feel left out and all his other friends think it might turn out to be a better fit for him.

Jisung swaps his classes and joins in on all the meetings with Seungmin by his side. He keeps true to his promise and always explains and reads things out to him. The strategics team enjoys having him— the mastermind of everything they're now doing.

It feels a little overwhelming for people to know that this is only happening because of what he had said, how he convinced so many people that this was the right path to go. Because what if it fails? What if things all go wrong and it's all on his shoulders? His idea, the mastermind of the fall of humanity.

But he won't let them fail.

He has been determined ever since he climbed up to the top of the wall—where Chan was waiting to catch him down below— that's where he decided that they will fall, in front of him, because of him and Jisung will live up to that.

They will burn. And he will watch, everyone beside him watching as their destruction is fired back on them.

They spend their days training hard, building up strength, working to formulate a strong plan and a stronger team.

And like that, Jisung wakes on the morning of a sunny March morning to see Eunbyul pulling herself up in her cot, standing on wobbly legs as she babbles quietly to herself. Jisung rushes Minho awake and they cheer for her. Jisung picks her up and spins her around, kissing her cheeks.

“Happy birthday, my little star,” he murmurs and she smiles wide while Minho wipes a lone tear from his cheek.

When they trail down the stairs after putting on the clothing Mother Barbada made for them— she had to alter Eunbyul’s dress slightly so she’d get more wear out of it— everyone is in the kitchen, standing around a feast of fresh fruits and mini cakes decorated with little stars.

Jisung bursts out into tears, hugging his daughter as all his friends comfort him.

Last year, he had almost died. A whole year since they arrived at Mydar, carrying his limp body covered in blood. He has hazy memories of that time, but what he remembers, he knows he’ll never forget. The gunfire and their older friends fighting through the guards, desperate for help but the guards insistent in not letting strangers into their home.

Looking back on it now, it certainly was crazy but he was inches away from death. Everyone could see it and no one was going to risk

his and Eunbyul's life over an approval that could've taken hours. Had it not been for Fern that day, Jisung isn't so sure that he would've made it.

Changbin pats his back while Eunbyul presses sloppy kisses to his cheeks, patting his face in her small hands. Jisung smiles and hugs her tightly.

"Everything is okay," Jisung breathes out. "I just... I'm a little overwhelmed," Minho holds him tight around his shoulders, nuzzling at him gently as Felix wipes away his tears and presses a kiss to his cheek.

Felix doesn't ever shy away from affection and they've all grown used to his loving touches. Felix had been the first person to give Jisung affection after seven long years. He'll hold a special place in Jisung's heart forever.

Fern gives him a hug when Minho takes their daughter and puts her in the high chair at the head of the table, in front of a larger cake and a bowl of fresh fruit cut up into smaller pieces. Eunbyul reaches for a piece of mango and Minho pops it into her mouth and she smiles, showing her four little teeth.

Mother Barbada neatens out her curls and kisses the top of the baby's head.

Fern rubs Jisung's arm and leads him to the table, next to Eunbyul who reaches out a piece of mango to Jisung, opening her mouth as if to tell him to do the same. Jisung smiles and eats the mango from her

hand and she claps happily.

The celebration goes on until Eunbyul falls asleep in Minho's arms, food all over her face and somehow in her hair.

They talk about the past year, from arriving at Mydar, the tiny newborn she once was and how much she grew in the months they were apart.

After her bath, she sleeps while in the garden Minho builds a play area for her. He'd been working on the design and getting the materials in the weeks leading up to her birthday. Jisung watches him assemble the little slide and the little house for the little bear family Jisung and Felix made together in their free time.

Their training was called off today for a rest day. They had them every two weeks to rejuvenate so it's easier on their mind and bodies. Jisung is glad it fell on Eunbyul's birthday so they can spend the whole day together.

The baby is ecstatic with her new toys and she plays with everyone with her new teddy family and takes turns being helped down the little slide Minho made. They have dinner in the garden, boards of flavoursome pulled lamb and pork, vegetables cooked in a spice rub and plain rice. Mother Barbada brings out more mangoes and Eunbyul eats fistfuls of rice with the sweet fruit.

Jisung hurries after Eunbyul when she's finished her food as she crawls away in the grass. He grabs her and she squeals.

When he puts her back on the ground, she pulls on his hands and hauls herself to her feet. “Oh!” Jisung exclaims and a small commotion breaks out behind him when she hesitates before taking a little step. Her legs shake and she laughs loudly before she falls back onto her butt.

Jisung claps his hands and she copies him before he picks her up, smothering her in kisses.

Minho bounds over and cheers and soon enough there’s a crowd surrounding them, applauding the infants efforts.

They stare up at the stars that night, remembering how they slept while she was safe inside his womb, softly stirring.

Minho is curled up behind Jisung, holding Eunbyul to his chest as she points up at the stars, slowly falling asleep. It brings back memories. Memories of holding his growing stomach, staring up at the glimmering things overhead. Little times of peace during a perilous journey. Jisung will savour those moments and the ones like this for the rest of his life.

Only one year ago they slept every night under the stars for eight months. Jisung feels at ease, his mind finally letting go of all his worries and the thoughts biting him at the back of his mind. The night air is cool when he breathes in, crisp and it calms him, reminds him even more of those starlit nights around a small fire to try to keep warm without lighting a signal for them to be found.

He thinks it's a little bit odd to be comforted by the remembrance of those nights. Even though it had been peaceful, quiet and only them in what felt like the whole world, there was no moment their minds wandered from the worries of being caught or something happening to anyone. It wasn't a peaceful time in their lives, but it was the first taste of freedom for the first time in their lives. To not be surrounded by walls or rules that if broken would lead to your death.

Jisung falls asleep under the stars, content and warm in Minho's arms, his daughter's little breaths lulling him into the gentle ease of sleep.

He wakes when he feels his slippers come off and his pants—it was too hot in the warmer nights to sleep with longer garments—and he finds Minho hovering over him. He smiles softly and peppers a kiss on his forehead. He pulls the blanket up to his chin and pats his chest.

“Sleep,” he whispers to him. He sees Chan in the corner of his fluttering eyelids placing Eunbyul in her cot beside them and he smiles before he falls back asleep.

→

Minho ducks under his leg, gripping onto his ankle as he swings his body down. Jisung yelps as he falls onto his back. Minho pins him against the grass, one thigh across his chest and his wrist by his head. Jisung stares up into his eyes for a few seconds before he lifts his pelvis, jarring Minho up and he slides out of his grip within the few moments he had and pins his hips with his knees, sitting on his lower

abdomen.

He holds Minho's hands tight in his grip, pinning them above his head.

"Oh," Minho muses with a sly smile. Cala is clapping in the background and Valkyrie is whooping at his victory— mostly Minho's loss but Jisung takes it either way. Her cheers alert the rest of their friends and Hyunjin begins to laugh loudly with his wife, grabbing on her as if she can keep him up while laughing. Felix is shouting encouraging words with a bright smile and Chan is cheering for Jisung and laughing at Minho who's staring dumbly up at his lover.

"This is not a position I thought we'd be in public," Minho snorts and Jisung shoves a handful of grass into his mouth, rolling his eyes at him as he climbs off him.

Minho splutters, sitting up and spitting out the strands of grass. "Gross," Minho scrunches his nose up at Jisung.

"That was so mean!" Jisung laughs as Jeongin swoops him up in his arms, cheering while Changbin runs laps around Minho before jumping on him, tackling him on the ground. They wrestle for a little bit on the grass until Cala comes over and clears her throat.

"They get a bit excited," Chan whispers to her and she laughs.

"You are all young," her face falls then and Jisung doesn't need to

ask why. Because of how young they are and their current positions and their past that has brought them to this point. Her eyes flicker to where Eunbyul is across the grassy arena playing with Fern with her teddy family, babbling happily. Her eyes come back to Jisung and she smiles softly.

She hurts for him. Knowing that he had her so young and that he never had a choice. Their stories had gotten out recently to inform them of The Capital's actions and what they've led to. Jisung hasn't noticed too much of a difference in how they're treated. Really, if anything the respect everyone has for them has significantly increased since they spoke out.

"Everyone has improved so much in combat," she says proudly. "Next lessons we'll be focusing on how to disarm armed people and engage in armed combat ourselves," she sends a look to Valkyrie who smiles sweetly at her. Minho rolls his eyes at her and she squares her shoulders at him when Cala looks away. Jisung tries his best not to laugh at their antics.

"Alright! Dismissed! Go to the armoury next lesson! We'll be needing equipment!"

"Sounds exciting!" Valkyrie sings and Seungmin grimaces softly.

"Are you sure you need armed combat lessons?" He asks quietly and Valkyrie shrugs.

"Snow lions and those orange cats are much different opponents than armed humans trying to kill us."

“Fair point,” Hyunjin wraps an arm around her shoulders. “Don’t team up with Minho next lessons. I don’t want to be sewing up any wounds... even if it’s from fooling around.”

“Mother Barbada said she’s making rose tarts this afternoon,” Jeongin pipes up. “I’m going to help her!” He calls as he runs off.

“Oh! Me too!” Valkyrie rushes after him and the two youngest race each other. Valkyrie will win no doubt but Jeongin laughs loudly as he tries to keep up with her fast legs.

Fern walks over slowly with Eunbyul holding onto her hands, walking unsteadily to Jisung. She’s talking loudly and Jisung’s heart almost stops when he hears her little call clearly.

“Dada!” She squeals, legs bouncing underneath her and she falls only for Fern to scoop her up and point at Jisung. “Dada!” She repeats and Felix is at Jisung’s side, rubbing his back just as he bursts out into tears.

He cries regularly over her hitting milestones but he doesn’t know how else to let out the absolute pride and joy he feels for her.

He takes her and gives her a big hug. She squeals and hugs him back, her head resting on his shoulder. Minho brushes her hair out of her eyes and kisses her forehead, a big smile on his face too.

“I was wondering when you would start talking!” Jisung tickles her tummy and she giggles. “Always muttering in baby language, but look! You can say dada!”

“Dada!” She repeats and laughs when they cheer for her. “Dada!”

→

Jisung pokes his head into Felix and Chan’s shared room, looking for his best friend after bathing Eunbyul and putting her to sleep after dinner.

He doesn’t find his blonde friend, but he does find Chan looking at a piece of tattered paper across the bed in the middle of the room.

The room is smaller than his and Minho’s but he knows it’s bigger because they have Eunbyul with them.

“What are you looking at?” Chan jumps slightly at Jisung’s voice and he swiftly apologises. Chan beckons him to come over and he shuffles over to his side. His friend wraps an arm around his waist. It has been a while since he’s been in the eldest’s arms. He’s always been able to soothe his nerves and his touch alone relaxes him. He’ll forever be grateful for him.

Spread across the bed is a deteriorating map. The lines done in ink

have smudged, bleeding out into the crumbling piece of paper. Jisung frowns at it.

“I don’t know what it is but it looks oddly familiar.”

Chan chuckles softly. “That might be because its a map of the institution,”

Jisung blinks at him and turns back to the map. “Hyunjin drew it,” he says softly. “This was the first thing we did to get our plan started. We needed a good map to know how to get around. We spent months studying it.” A small smile tugs at the corners of his lips. “Minho made a diagram out of produce boxes once so we cloud visualise it better...” he speaks fondly of the memory.

“Did it help?” Jisung asks, intrigued to learn more about how the plan to save the four of them came about.

“Yeah,” Chan nods his head. “It made it easier to figure out which way went where.” He pauses for a little while. “Minho is really talented. Smart,”

“Isn’t he?” Jisung chuckles lightly. The first impression he had of Minho wasn’t much, only that he was crazy for breaking in and even crazier for breaking him out. He hadn’t got to know him much within the first few weeks. He had felt odd around him, unsure of how to read him or respond to anything he did.

But Minho now is like cool water cradling his body, healing wounds inside him and breathing life into him. Jisung wouldn't have had their beginning any other way.

"It's uhh... pretty well-loved," Jisung laughs and Chan chuckles at it. "Well it has been through quite a lot," he muses. "Rapids... oceans... more water," Chan snorts. "I'm surprised it's still in one piece... no including all the holes of course. It's not ripped into several tiny pieces so that's something,"

"Always the optimist we need," Jisung says fondly. Chan smiles widely at him. "We could make another," Jisung speaks up. "We are in a pretty developed settlement after all,"

"We could," Chan agrees. "But it'd be a bit of work,"

"That doesn't matter," Jisung tells him gently. "I'm sure we can find someone willing to help us out. Besides, I'm pretty sure the strategics class would enjoy a good map to give us some insight," Jisung beams and Chan hums, nodding his head. "I'll ask Minho if he knows something," Chan concludes, going back to stare at the parchment littered with holes and smudged black ink.

→

Where Jisung made adequate progress in the combat lessons, he doesn't have half as much luck with the armed combat classes.

He narrowly dodges the golden lasso in Cala's hand and scrambles away only to be tangled in it within the next second.

Cala sighs and he looks up at the sky as her tug makes him lose his footing. "Can you wield one better?" She asks, untangling him by pressing a button on the handle and flicking her wrist in a smooth circle.

"I... Maybe?" He winces a bit when he gets back to his feet. "I can get guns out of peoples hands but these things... I'm glad that these are only in The City of Sivra."

"Me and you both," Cala hums. "You are better if disarming firearms... but your shot once you get it... Your evaluation shows that your shooting could be better," she says it nicely but Jisung knows that he sucks. His arm shakes when he tries to aim and he flinches when the gun fires, making his shot even further off his target. The strategic lessons have worked out in his favour much better than trying to learn how to shoot.

"But you have a good head on your shoulders," Cala concludes. "And I am confident you will be able to hold your ground in a fight," Jisung smiles at her and she pats his back. "You have done well in other areas. Your evaluation reports on your strategics are very high," Jisung flushes brightly. "But I suppose that's what I'd expect from the boy who started this whole thing," she gestures around her. Jisung purses his lips, his teeth digging into his bottom lip.

"I can't take all the credit," he says. "I was just crazy enough to say something. To want this. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for a lot of people,"

“Of course,” Cala agrees. “But you must know that if it weren’t for you taking that first step this would’ve never happened,”

“Maybe not,” Jisung says quietly and Cala cocks her head gently at him.

“You have a strategic lesson now?” Cala then asks, gesturing to Seungmin waving at him from across the armoury. “Yeah,” Jisung nods his head slowly. “Thank you for everything, Cala,” the woman smiles, brown eyes twinkling.

“Go on,” she pats him on the back again, ushering him towards his friend.

Seungmin hugs his shoulders and beams as they walk to their strategic class.

“You remember the map you asked the mechanic team a little while ago?” Seungmin asks and Jisung tilts his head at him, intrigued. “I’m pretty sure it’s done so we’re going to work with that a bit today.”

“Sounds like a good plan,”

Minho had helped out the team directly with both his past experience with the building itself and building his own model of it. Even if it was out of produce boxes that slowly grew soggy in the humid

months.

The royal study rooms are where the mechanics, medical and strategic classes are held. Instead of the heat of the desert sun that they train underneath, the rooms are cool. Air conditioning is conducted throughout the palace to cool the inner walls of the royals home. The coolness is welcoming and Jisung sighs, his shoulders sagging in relief.

Fern smiles at him from across the room where they've huddled around the model of the institution. Chan had brought up that he wished they could've made a better map, one that covered not just the institution. He had done enough and Jisung told him that. His oldest friend had smiled softly and thanked him.

Eunbyul is now with Isa, probably being spoiled rotten of course.

Fern beckons them over and Jisung manoeuvres through the rows of desks facing an interactive wall that then flashes and brings up previous strategies and lessons they've had before. Jisung spots Hyunjin's battered old map across the screen and he smiles before he takes in the model in front of him.

His chest tightens at the uncanny sight of it. It is a perfect replica. Down to the two trees at the front of the building and the garden at the back, in the centre of the big white building. The windows, bared and closed off like a jail cell, the stark whiteness of it all. Jisung doesn't know if that was intended or if they just left it, not knowing how to paint it.

Even the two walls— the electric fence around the institution and The Capital's main wall looms around the building.

Seungmin clutches his hand tightly, his own palm sweaty in Jisung's hold.

"It's..." Jisung croaks out. "It's exact... that's what it looks like," Fern hugs him around his shoulders, bringing him into a hug while Seungmin softly leans against her side, her other arm around his waist.

"I could find my room on this thing," Seungmin comments as he pulls out of the hug. Jisung lingers in Fern's arms, turning around so his back is pressed to her chest. Her arms settle around his middle, still hugging him. Jisung appreciates it.

"There," Seungmin points to the left wing of the building. Someone lifts the floors, giving him an expecting look. "Third floor," he says in a soft tone and when it's revealed, Seungmin sighs deeply. The room is empty, unfurnished from all the details but Jisung is glad. He knows Seungmin is too by the shaky breath he heaves out.

It's a small room, shaped exactly the way Jisung's room was, though flipped.

"Mine," Jisung wets his lips as he gestures to the floor above in the person's hands. They place it back down, holding the fifth and final floor in their hands. Jisung looks at it in their hands and they understand to put it down. There's no roof attached to the model and Jisung peers over, eyes going to the right side of the building and to

the tiny room sandwiched between the surgical rooms and one of the testing labs. Jisung shivers as he reaches out a hand to point to the tiny room. He had spent most of his seven years in that tiny room.

Too many memories he made in there. Never good. His hand subconsciously clutches at his stomach.

“We will have much time to study this in detail and make plans,” Fern says, finally unwrapping her arms around Jisung. He misses her warmth but he nods.

“We will be back in Mydar soon,” she announces. “In two weeks we are to transport all teams and volunteers to Mydar for the final preparations.” Jisung stares up at her. She smiles though it doesn’t quite reach her eyes.

It’s coming. Quick. And there’s absolutely nothing Jisung can do about that.

Fear flashes through his body, hot and he gulps, staring at the model of the white building.

He imagines stomping his boot-clad foot over it, smashing it to smithereens. His blood is hot in his veins and he reaches out blindly, clasping on Seungmin’s hand tightly.

He will destroy that place.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi one Eunbyul pls thank u

She's too cute I literally cannot.

This chapter was too soft omg and aaaa thanks for the support last chapter! I'm actually almost finished writing this fic but i just don't wanna let it go... and in two days it'll be officially a year since i first opened the document for the prologue and began writing this fic... I'm a little emotional i have attachment issues :0

Also this is so close to 1000 kudos :O WTFFF i have something planned for when it get there so if u like my writing and are interested in other works... i may have something up my sleeve... heheh

As always thank you so much!! I love you all!!

At the final evaluation in The City of Sivra, most people are finally put into groups that they'll be in for the remainder of the time before they go to The Capital.

Firing squads are made up of the highest-ranking students in all the firing classes. Jisung obviously missed out on a spot on that team.

The nine of them are together, a special unit that everyone had voted on to stay together. They had escaped The Capital together, crossed the sea between continents and walked all the way to freedom. No one doubts their strength or their minds.

Cala smiles at him from across the pavilion when they lock eyes. Jisung smiles back at her.

The ships will be leaving tomorrow morning as soon as each ship was filled with both its designated passengers and the equipment everyone has brought.

Mother Barbada taps him on the back and he turns to see her smiling with Eunbyul in her arms. His daughter smiles widely and mutters a soft "Dada," before she reaches out for him. He takes her and holds her close.

“I must pack my bags tonight,” Mother Barbada concludes with a soft nod. She decided that she’s needed and they will not be leaving for Mydar without her.

No one complains about this. Everyone is happy for her to tag along. Jisung hopes she enjoys the kitchens in Mydar and he can already see her ruling them, teaching the kitchen aids how to make her delightful rose pastries.

Princess Amira is the only royal coming with them to Mydar. The two queens chose to stay here after their daughter volunteered to join them. She had taken her own lessons in a few skills. Her evaluation showed her strength is in the medical teams and combat. She wished to join the medical team on the front of the battle. It is a risky position but her mothers hadn’t objected to their daughter’s wishes.

It’s all still quite overwhelming to Jisung that they are now this close. Each passing second they grow closer to the final stand down and his body trembles at the thought.

He sleeps restlessly that night.

He sits awake after not being able to fall asleep and stares out the window at the crescent moon glowing in the sky. Minh’s hands enclose around his waist and he sighs softly at his touch. “You can’t sleep?” He asks, voice thick with sleep. Jisung’s eyelids are heavy and he wants to sleep. He really does but his mind screams at him about everything that could possibly go wrong.

“No,” he croaks out. His hand dances up his spine, coming to softly

play with his dark strands of hair.

“You’re thinking about something,” Minho presses a kiss on his shoulder. Jisung sighs softly.

“We’re off to Mydar in the morning,” he says and Minho hums softly against his skin. “I’m afraid that things aren’t going to go well... and then it’ll be all my fault,” he admits slowly and Minho lifts his head, fingers gentle underneath his chin as he tilts his head slightly so they meet eyes.

“Hey,” his fingers stroke his cheek softly. “It is scary,” he says in a hushed tone. “And it is unknown but look at what we have. The Capital won’t know what hit them,” he smiles then and Jisung’s heart flutters softly.

“You are brave,” he presses a soft kiss to his lips. Jisung’s eyelids flutter shut and he leans into it. Minho holds him tighter. “And you are resilient and strong... the weight of this isn’t just on your shoulders. If you feel like it’s getting heavy to carry it around though,” he kisses him again. Jisung grips at his shoulders and he shifts, the silky sheets sliding over his bare legs. “I am here. I am forever here with you,” he tells him. “Share it with me,”

With Minho holding him and running his fingers through his hair as they lay down, he finally falls asleep, his body light and his mind eased from his contrast worry and fear.

The replica of the institution is situated in the middle of their ship's lounging area.

"Holy shit," Jeongin mutters, eyes wide as he takes in the amount of detail in the miniature model. Minho looks rather proud as he stands in the corner, back pressed against the wall with one leg bent, arms across his chest.

"That's..." Felix stares at it and then looks over at Jisung with his brows furrowed tightly.

"Insanely detailed," Jeongin finishes for him and Felix nods. Valkyrie stares at it with her head cocked and her arms over her chest as she leans against Hyunjin.

"It is very white," she muses. "Like it is made of snow."

"More like blinding white tiles," Jisung huffs out and Seungmin pats his back. Eunbyul is shuffling around their feet. She still hasn't learnt how to walk by herself but she's getting darn close. Jisung watches her as she throws her bear at the model. Minho laughs and Jeongin cheers her on.

"That's right!" Changbin tickles her as he picks her up. She squeals happily and Jisung hands her back the bear only for her to hit the model repeatedly.

Chan snorts and Eunbyul claps her hands, laughing.

“But seriously this would’ve been really helpful when we were trying to figure out what your map meant,” Changbin pipes up and Hyunjin slaps his arm but he smiles at his friend.

“Minho’s model out of soggy cardboard was quite good,” Chan muses and Minho beams proudly. Jisung swallows his laugh.

“For someone who had never seen the institution, I think I did pretty well.” Hyunjin agrees with Minho, and Chan reaches out and tug Minho towards them and slides an arm around his shoulders.

“After seeing it in person you really got all those details.”

“Some things you just can’t forget,” Minho whispers quietly. Jisung gazes down at his feet. Minho is right. No matter how long it will be Jisung just knows that he’ll always remember each wall, each turn and every tile in the Institution. Minho had been there for as little as half an hour and he remembered this much detail.

“So... there has to be a much bigger reason why we have this... obviously, someone is thinking of a plan already?” Chan smiles at Seungmin who raises a brow.

“Plans take time to perfect,” Chan replies. “That’s why our breakout was so smooth.”

“I must say it was pretty impressive,” Jeongin nods his head and Valkyrie looks intrigued. They’d told her the story of their breakout a few times but each time she looked as surprised and awestruck as the last. It makes the older four feel quite proud.

“But yes,” Chan then points to the model. “There are others in there. They weren’t in there when we broke you guys out but for sure there are young boys in there that need saving.”

“They kept us in our homes until we hit our cycles,” Felix says quietly. “Two years after we receive the first needle.”

No one needs to ask what the first needle is. Jisung recalls that first moment and how he had screamed and cried as they stuck the needle deep into his abdomen. Red hot pain had flared through him. His abdomen clenches as if it’s responding and Jisung grimaces as he presses a warm palm to his stomach.

“They’ve had to have brought some of them in by now,” Seungmin says quietly. Jisung doesn’t doubt it either.

“So then... I guess on the flight to Mydar this is what we’re going to discuss?” Changbin asks.

“Brainstorming time,” Seungmin adds and Chan nods his head.

“I thought that was a rather good idea. Is anyone not up for it?”

“As if any of us would be against it,” Jeongin scoffs and he flops himself down on a seatthe lounge. Eunbyul pulls herself up and tries to climb up. Jeongin tucks a hand under her bottom and scoops her up to his lap. She settles happily in his lap, showing off her bear to him.

Jisung smiles at them and Minho then appears behind him, wrapping his arms around his waist and pressing him against his chest. “You’re in pain,” he mutters against his ear and Jisung hums softly.

“It’s just my cycle,” he tells him honestly. “It’s not the best feeling in the world,”

“I’ll give you a massage?” He offers and Jisung smiles wide.

“Okay.” He accepts it and Minho leads him to the lounge. He sits him on his lap, however, and Jisung raises a brow but then his warm hand knead against his abdomen and he sighs, relaxing against him.

“There’s one thing though,” Hyunjin mentions quietly. They all look at him and he grimaces. “Uhh... since we broke out... it has been a while and, um, what if things have changed? What happens if we make a plan that is good against our past experience but when we get there it’s completely changed?”

Jisung’s teeth dig into his bottom lip.

“Well...” Seungmin starts softly. He gulps and his eyes flicker to Jisung. The room grows quiet for a few seconds. “There is someone that has been in The Capital much more recently than us.”

Jisung breathes heavily out his nostrils.

“I’m not talking to him,” he grits out through his teeth. Seungmin stares at his hands.

“I don’t know who else he’d answer to?” Felix says quietly. “He’s never said anything to us before.”

“I can’t,” Jisung shakes his head. “His presence makes me want to skin him,” he hisses out and Felix’s lips press into a thin line, his eyes sad and concerned.

“Then we will all talk to him,” Chan says. “Together. With Fern and Isa, too.”

“No weapons,” Changbin adds quietly.

“No weapons,” Chan confirms.

Jisung stares at his friends and then sighs loudly. “Fine,” he agrees. “But that’s it. He just needs to answer our questions. Nothing more

than that.”

—

Mydar’s structure has changed since the last time they’d been here. Smaller buildings—not shaped like trees much to everyone’s dissatisfaction—litter the ground and canvas tents are popped up around the flat fields around. Mydar itself looks the same, except for a small extension where their old residence is.

Their ship lands where it always does, in the largest open bay just under where the exit of the elevator is. The rest of the fleet has to land on the fields in rows. From up here, they can see several aircrafts and it makes Jisung laugh softly.

The fleet is massive and Jisung thinks they are going to need a lot more tents and open residences for everyone. The kitchen aids will be overwhelmed with quantities for a while.

In a smaller Mydar ship, Fern and Isa exit with a few other leaders. The flight was only a full day and night but the taller woman looks fed up with all their chatter. Isa, however, talks away, engaging with enough enthusiasm for both her and her quiet wife.

She gives Jisung a soft smile before she zooms away, most likely to the privacy of her home. Jisung taps Minho on the shoulder and smiles at him. “Let’s get settled back in, hey?”

Their old residence is exactly as they left it. Jisung finds Eunbyul's newborn clothes in the drawer in his old room and nearly sobs when he compares them to her now.

The beds are smaller than the ones he and Minhoo had shared for the past few months in The City of Sivra but it feels comforting to be back here.

They had healed here, found leisure in life for the first time in a long time. Jisung had researched through audiobooks on past revolutions and decided to finally start his own.

He flinches on his bed when he hears grunting and he looks over to see Minhoo pushing the beds together.

"You almost won't be able to use the door," Jisung snorts as Minhoo pushes their beds together.

"Almost," Minhoo sings back with a soft smile. "Come here," the elder opens up his arms and Jisung shuffles over, crawling across the mattresses to bury himself against Minhoo's chest.

It's moments like these that Jisung tries to cling onto. Moments of peace and comfort that eases the rising feelings inside him.

Instead of hauling the model of the iInstitution from the ship all the way to Fern and Isa's office, they take it to their own residence and place it in their lounge room.

But that also ultimately meant they won't be meeting up with Jisung's estranged father in the leader's premises but in their home. Jisung isn't quite happy about that.

Minho has an arm slung around his shoulders when the man comes in, looking hesitant as he trails after Isa. His eyes land on Jisung and he sighs when he recognises the look of hatred burning in his orbs.

Then his eyes go to the model of the institution and he stares at it for a few seconds before his eyes dart back to Jisung. He looks uneasy and Jisung presses himself harder against Minho's side in response to his stare.

"We've asked you to come so you can answer some of our questions." It's Jeongin who speaks, hands on his hips and his eyes narrowed at the older man. His gaze moves to him and he blinks a few times, his mouth opening as if he was about to say something. Instead, he bites down on his bottom lip and nods his head once.

Jeongin seems proud of himself by the way his chest puffs out and he smiles triumphantly.

“You’re from The Capital,” Chan says plainly and Youngho gulps, nodding his head.

Jisung doesn’t know when he had left. Whether it had been after they left themselves or if he’d taken Jaein and run while he was locked up in the Institution.

“When did you leave?” Jisung speaks up. Youngho looks over at him, his eyes pained.

“When your mother died... a few months after the news of the breakout from the institution,” he confirms and Hyunjin lets out a deep breath, relieved that he’s seen it much more recently than they have.

“I didn’t know it was you,” he admits, still looking at Jisung. “They didn’t mention any names... none at all except for... for Hyunjin,” he looks over at the young doctor and he stiffens.

Hyunjin had been the piece that finally allowed the breakout to go as smoothly as it did. He was a trusted employee, someone high enough in the ranks to have access to rooms. He was trusted because his father was an esteemed part of the committee.

Hyunjin releases a shaky breath. Valkyrie clutches tightly on his hand, snaking her arms around his waist and leaning against him. Hyunjin holds her close.

“The Capital grew... firmer and the slums were shut off from the wall... and any help we had ever received, as little as it had been... it just all stopped. People starved along with women still becoming infected... water supplies were drying up and there was nothing left... I don’t know how many people are still alive there. I don’t know if anyone’s left at all... one farmer tried his best to offer crops to us but he could only offer the small ones, burnt from the sun because the demand in The Capital had suddenly increased,”

Minho heaves in a deep breath through his nose at that. His father, no doubt was that farmer trying his best to help them out. Minho hopes he’s safe and that when they finally storm in, he’ll be reunited with his father after so long.

He feels guilty for leaving him all alone on the farm. But Youngho’s words at least tell him that he hadn’t been killed for being the father of a suspected traitor.

“The pond—the one we used to fish in, do you remember?” He looks at his own, eyes glazed over and wide. Maybe he hoped to bring back memories of easier times—when he hadn’t betrayed him and sent him to his death for money that obviously hadn’t helped them out enough to survive the plummet of the slums.

“We went that way.” He says. “Into the woods belong and only a few days later we ended up in a field,” he licks his lips and gulps. “Jaein saw something in the fields and instead of staying by my side, she ran towards it. It could’ve been people from The Capital, but to our luck, it was a Rahkain ship. A group of scientists had travelled to collect samples of the earth, they said so they could compare the make-up of the jungles to the plains—I didn’t know what it meant but they offered us safety. They took us to Rahka within two days from outside The Capital.”

His story only makes Jisung angrier at him.

He had travelled for not even a week before they'd gotten a ride on a ship to safety.

They had walked for eight months. Thin, weak and him pregnant. Each step took much out of him. He suspects that also contributed to Eunbyul's traumatic birth and all the complications he had.

Why hadn't a ship been around the corner for them?

He knows it's useless to be jealous about that, but he is and he can't help the anger that builds up inside him.

Minho rubs his side, knowing that he's fuming with hatred for the man in front of them.

"They sent people after you guys," he mutters. "A group in a smaller aircraft to try to find tracks you might've left, smoke signals from fires. They returned a month later after you broke out with nothing. It was strange..."

People had been after them and the realisation that for a whole month they could've been caught makes his stomach churn. He feels like he might vomit.

Minho's plan to bring them deep into the forest had been their saving grace. The thick mess of nature covered them for two whole weeks before they emerged to cross the rapids and fields of long grass.

Somehow, their route had taken them for a loop and after those first four weeks, they had been save from the trackers. Jisung feels relieved but the sickening feeling doesn't leave him. By Felix's and Seungmin's pale faces, he knows they're feeling the same.

"They took other boys after you left. Five other young boys. They sent gift packages to their families to encourage more volunteers." Jisung runs out of Minho's grip this time and rushes to the bathroom. He heaves over the toilet bowl, tears pricking in his vision.

They won't stop. Not unless someone forces them to.

He feels Felix's hand rubbing against his back. He hears him crying quietly and he sobs louder. "That's not fair," Jisung cries out. "We need to hurry and save them!"

"I know," Felix croaks out. He helps Jisung back to his feet and engulfs him in a hug.

"They are so young," he whispers against Felix's neck. "So small and scared,"

"We will save them," Felix takes Jisung's face between his two hands. He meets his watery eyes with his own tears orbs and nods his head.

“We’ll get them out before anything else happens to them,”

They had only been in there for a little over a year if his father was correct. Which meant their cycles hadn’t started yet. They had time. But not a lot.

Felix hugs him again and Jisung then washes out his mouth, flushes the toilet and goes back to the lounge. Minho is watching him with tight eyebrows, his eyes soft and full of concern. Felix lets go of his hand, wipes his sleeve over his leaking eyes and hurries off to Chan’s side, snuggling up to him.

Jisung collapses against Minho’s chest, taking a few deep breaths while he’s hidden from everyone’s view. “They will pay,” Minho whispers to him. “They won’t get away with this,”

“I hope they’re okay...” Seungmin whispers. “And safe...” his voice dies off and he plonks down on the lounge behind him.

Youngho looks around the room and gulps and the sombre atmosphere.

“There were others,” Jeongin speaks up. Jisung finally turns away from Minho’s chest and looks at him. He looks just as horrified and he’s clinging to Valkyrie who’s holding him tightly. Hyunjin is behind her, his jaw tight and his eyes hard. He’s furious.

“Others that were just about to hit their cycles.” Jeongin continues.

“Like me, you enter the facility full time once you start to have them.” He pauses and frowns deeply. “It... they won’t be fertile for the first six cycles they have... those first few are left alone to ready the uterus for what’s to come... like a jump start in a way.”

“So... would any of them be...” Jisung feels like he’s going to throw up again.

“I don’t think so,” Seungmin says this time. “The first one to hit his first cycle after we did was Beomgyu... he was half a year away from what his tests showed,”

“Then...” Chan looks down at the model.

“If we’re not ready in a few months those boys are going to go through the exact same thing I did,” Jisung says. He looks around at the crowd. Youngho is staring at him, eyes welled with tears.

“We can’t have that,” his voice breaks and Minho wraps him up in a hug.

They had seen what it had done to him. His mind was in tethers when they first escaped but it had shattered when the knowledge of his pregnancy was known to him.

He can’t let anyone else suffer the way he did. He will not allow anyone else to feel so lost and dead.

“Is the Institution any different?” Jisung asks the question directly to his father and his mouth twitches.

“There are more guards around the walls of the institution... and I heard from rumours around the slums before it was shut off that more alarms were installed... like motion... motion somethings, I’m sorry I don’t know ab—“

“Motion detectors,” Minho grits out. “They had a few before that I had to unwire. What’s a few more?”

“It looks the same,” Youngho whispers out. “I saw it once when I was going to... to see if I could talk to you,” he looks at Jisung.

“I’m sorry,” he mutters out, tears rolling down his cheeks. Jisung stares at him, his jaw clenched and his fists tight by his sides. He looks away from him, refusing to give him any attention.

Minho rubs his hip gently.

“I really am sorry. I didn’t know it was going to be so—“

“Yes, you did!” Jisung grits out, whipping around to face him.

“You wouldn’t talk to me that morning! You said nothing to me even

when I cried for you! You knew that you were doing something wrong because you refused to speak, to explain or do anything for me!” His chest heaves and he sucks in a deep breath, trying to cool the fires rising in his blood. “You sold me,” he reminds him.

Youngho is frozen as he yells at him. “Don’t you dare try to say that you thought where I was going was good? I remember when we first heard the declaration and you,” he lets out a choked sob. “And you were so disgusted by it and you said it was so wrong. So why did it change? Why did you both decide I wasn’t worth anything but a few coins that obviously didn’t help as much as you thought it would?”

“Why?” Jisung asks him again when he doesn’t answer. His teeth are gritted as he speaks and he sees his father shake.

“You would’ve been well-fed,” he replies. “And we could’ve fed Jaein while you were there... warm and fed.”

Jisung lets out a hollow laugh.

Minho had seen his room. He had been in there and seen the thin blanket on the skinny mattress he slept on. He saw how thin and frail Jisung had been. He’s filled out much more now after proper nutrition but he remembers that exhausted boy that was fragile and weak. Being pregnant, he should’ve put on weight but with the lack of nutrients he had before and during the eight months they walked across continents, Minho was worried he’d snap in half.

“Well-fed?” Jisung spits out. “You sacrificed a child for your other one,” he says simply. Youngho stares at him.

“Instead of being warm and well-fed, they made me grow another organ. They poked me with endless needles. Got me pregnant and did nothing when I lost that baby.”

Jisung had only enclosed that information to Fern, Isa, Felix and Minho. Hyunjin had been there and his brows furrow sadly at the remembrance of his terrified screams and his desperate cries. Their other friends look horrified for him.

“They locked me in my room and left me alone to bleed it out. I thought I hated that baby until it was gone,” he admits. His father looks shocked to the core and he’s gone pasty white at his son’s words. “I was seventeen,” he spits out. “There was no warmth. Only a small bed and a single blanket in all the seasons. Food was scarce and if we acted out, we’d miss a day.”

Minho hadn’t known that fact but by Felix, Seungmin and Jeongin’s expressions, they had been at the hand of missing a day of eating at least once.

“You did nothing to help me,” he says.

“I... I know saying sorry isn’t enough,” his father tells him after a few moments of silence. “And I know there’s nothing I can do to fix this... but I can’t let you go so easily.”

“You let me go eight years ago,” Jisung grits out. “What’s the rest of a lifetime to you?”

Youngho hangs his head.

“I think it is time for me to leave?” He murmurs.

“Ah!” Chan pipes up and Youngho looks at him. “Not so fast,” he shakes his head at him. “As much as we all don’t want you here, you have vital information we want,” he leans across the table the model is sat upon and stares at the man.

“What else do you know? What else have those ears of yours heard in The Capital?”

“I don’t know what you want to know...” He admits. Chan chuckles and cocks his head at him. “Anything you’ve heard that’s remotely odd or interesting after we broke out,”

The man’s brows furrow in thought. It is quiet for a few moments until his brows raise.

“I had heard that men were disappearing... healthy and young ones from the slums... I do not know what for.”

“I think I know,” Changbin mutters. Minho shares a look with him and nods. Healthy and able men, naturally immune to the disease that they had no doubt made themselves to rid of the slums. After hearing that the slums were shut off, now clear that with weak, old and too young men and little women left they were trying to wipe out the less fortunate people of The Capital. Anger rises in him.

“Anything else?” Chan presses on, his eyes narrowed and brows in a tight frown.

“Uhh... I’m not too sure,” Youngho answers meekly.

“Anything about the power dynamics? Who is in charge? Any changes in political power?” Seungmin asks and the man’s eyes widen.

“Of course,” he mutters.

He turns to Hyunjin, staring at the man with intense curiosity.

“The last president died weeks after the breakout,” Youngho reveals.

Hyunjin frowns. “President Falcon was young and healthy last I heard of him,” Hyunjin says with his head cocked.

“So I thought, too,” Youngho shrugs.

“But all I know is that your father now has the seat of power over the whole entirety of The Capital.”

All colour from Hyunjin's face is flushed away, replaced by a pale white. He blinks at the man, once, twice and thrice, his knees buckle and he hits the ground. Valkyrie cries out and hurries to his side. He leans against her, shock overcoming him.

“President Hwang controls everything.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Hiiii so so sorry for the lack of updates I'm struggling rn lol my health hasn't been the best atm and I'm swamped in exams and work :(I have ten chapters left to write before overmorrow is officially completed and I'm sad lol

Jisung stares at Hyunjin.

His face is void of any colour and he looks as if he's going to pass out any second. Valkyrie holds him close to her chest, her hands rubbing his sides gently as if to help ground him.

Jisung remembers him clearly. The hands that poked him, the sly smile on the face that he hates so much, the man who had looked at him with such disgust and annoyance when he sat bleeding in the treatment bed.

He's not someone Jisung wants to remember at all but now with this new piece of information, everything comes back to him. He sees Hyunjin for the first time again, a scared young boy peering over a clipboard that looked like he was uncomfortable with invading his space. That was one of the reasons why Jisung had been able to forgive him so easily.

Hyunjin lets out a shaky breath and lifts his head to meet eyes with Jisung from across the room. Jisung stares back, not bothering to hide the clear horror that is etched over his face. Hyunjin mirrors his own expression.

"We have to bring him down," he says. Chan is stiff by the model, his shoulders squared and his jaw clenched.

Jisung thinks about what he did to him in the Institution and he feels his knees buckle under his weight. Minho reaches out for his hip and guides him to the lounge where he falls against, his brows knitted tightly together and his heart beating rapidly.

He had power in the Institution. Enough so he was able to control what was happening in that building. Because he was a renowned doctor, the higher-ups in the government had allowed him to make those professional decisions.

His word was above anything else in the Institution. Jisung was victim to his orders and his hands too many times.

But for him now to have complete control over the entirety of The Capital Jisung fears that.

The Capital was never a safe place under the old order of control, but Doctor Hwang is something else.

The words he had spat at Jisung, reminding him he was nothing but a slave to the system, the things he did to him, the things he threatened him with. Jisung knows they don't have much time now to get things organised and save the innocent citizens of The Capital.

“He can’t...” Hyunjin mutters out. The pain in his eyes makes Jisung shudder. “If we don’t act soon, who knows what disaster we’re going to walk into?”

“We won’t let him get away with this, Hyunjin,” Minho whispers softly. Hyunjin looks up at his friend and nods.

“He was never a good father,” he mutters out. “He was a worse doctor,” he looks at Jisung. Hyunjin knew what he did to him. “He would come home at dinner and tell us all about his day... well the things he had done, nothing about it was for the sake of bonding or... getting to know each other. It was a time for him to brag about his accomplishments and how... how Jisung’s progress was going.”

Jisung isn’t surprised but he stills hangs his head, his cheeks flaring with warmth. He had done things to him that were too embarrassing for him to be able to look back on without feeling sickness curdle in his belly or his cheeks grow too hot.

He turns to Jisung’s father, his eyes wide as he struggles back to his feet. Valkyrie helps him up and she snuggles against his side, her arms protectively wrapped around his middle.

“What else do you know?”

Youngho blinks, obviously not expecting such a reaction from everyone. “I,” he gulps and scans the room before his eyes fall back on Hyunjin. He takes a deep breath in.

“When he first got the seat... things began to change... quite rapidly,” he says. Minho’s fists are clenched by his sides and Jisung reaches out to take one of his hands in his grasp. Minho gives him a soft smile.

“They hired more doctors in the Institution and more workers... and then... after a few weeks women in the wall became immune to the disease... it was quick.”

Minho stares, his mouth open as he processes the words. Hyunjin lets out a cry and his hands fly to his face. Valkyrie reaches up and takes his hands away, her fingers brushing over his cheeks, trying to calm him down.

“It was all them,” Jisung concludes.

They had thought it was them all along, but they didn’t have enough proof for them to really know if it was a man-made disease or if it was some freak of nature. But why? Why did they kill so many innocent people and destroy families? Why did they kill women on purpose and then rush to impregnate young boys?

Minho seethes with anger. “My own mother was killed,” he hisses out. “And it was them all along?”

“That doesn’t make sense why they then took us...” Seungmin adds.

“Oh no,” Hyunjin shakes his head. Youngho moves out of the way when Valkyrie shuffles them to the lounge. “It was the plan all along... I suspect.”

“What do you mean?” Jeongin frowns at him.

“Fear,” Hyunjin says. “Fear controls people. They knew that and used it to their advantage. As to why they took young boys instead of taking women...” He clenches at those words. Valkyrie stares at him with concern. “Vaccines are expensive to make and if they made them and took women... there would be potential problems from citizens wanting to be vaccinated. It was a power move. It was more expensive to make young boys suffer but it worked out for them because no one blinked an eye at it. If it had been any different this would’ve gone very very differently.”

And as crazy as it sounds to them all, they all know Hyunjin is right.

“Wiping out the slums,” Chan mutters this time. “Killing women first and then shutting it down... this isn’t just a power move. They want them dead.”

“To create and control the citizens,” Seungmin concludes in a whisper.

“God, that’s so fucked up,” Changbin murmurs.

“The disease was the starting point to clear out the people they didn’t want in their new world,” Changbin whispers. “They’re definitely planning something bigger than we first thought.”

“Keep the strong, kill the weak,” Felix adds. Fear is glazed in his eyes.

Jisung shuffles closer to him and bundles him up in a hug.

Hyunjin lets out a choked sob. Tears sting Jisung's own eyes and he feels a warm wetness seep into the material of his shirt from Felix.

“And we’re going to fuck that all up,” Minho growls out. “Burn them down,” he grits out.

Notes for the Chapter:

Shortest chapter yet but its one of the heavier ones...
the realisation in this chapter is where it all truly
begins to make sense so all the secrets are out :OO

“When we first broke out I always wanted something. I always wanted to do something to that fucking place,” Jisung mutters to Minho.

The breeze rustles his hair and Minho reaches up and brushes a few strands away from his face. They’ve wandered down to the fields below Mydar hoping to find some sort of peace away from all the tension around the camp and in the tree.

Eunbyul is seated in Minho’s lap, pulling at the grass with chubby fists and digging her toes into the dirt.

“I knew it was all so messed up,” he says with his cheek pressed against his knee. “It was like a bad nightmare I could never escape. Even while running it continued. Being pregnant... and having dreams of that place but I never knew it was so... so disgusting.”

“I miss my mother,” Minho says while he plays with Eunbyul’s soft curls. Jisung looks at him sadly. “I’m so sorry, Minho,” he whispers. Minho hangs his head low. “My mother was strong.” He says and tears well up in his eyes. Jisung shuffles closer to him and puts his head on his shoulder. “My father loved her so much. They were each other’s person... like how I feel for you... and do know she didn’t have to die... didn’t have to die in such pain or while we watched on helpless if it weren’t for those people behind that fucking wall makes me... I always agreed with you. To take them down but now I want nothing more than to show them that same pain we all felt. Mothers died, sisters, daughters and it was all on them,”

His mother had dark hair and a pair of soft brown eyes, always filled with love and happiness. Minhø sees the same look in Jisung's eyes when he looks at Eunbyul.

Jisung wipes the tears that drop down Minhø's cheeks.

"And god, Hyunjin's father?" He chokes out a sob. Eunbyul turns back to them and pulls herself up, concerned why he's crying. She plants a kiss to his mouth and Minhø smiles at her, cupping her face in his hands. "Da," she reaches for his face, staring at him with big eyes and Minhø pulls her in for a hug.

"I can't believe we didn't figure it out sooner... maybe then we could've done something," Minhø whispers out.

Jisung stares at him. "I know, Minhø... I really really do but... even if you had known you know exactly what they would've done," he whispers softly.

Minhø's lips press together tightly. "Shooting me on sight in the middle of a busy street seems more fair than killing innocent people for the hell of it. And then doing what they did do you?" Minhø's eyes narrow. "They're going to burn, Jisung."

"Right at our feet," Jisung adds. Minhø looks into his eyes and finds fires roaring. "Right at our feet," he agrees.

Eunbyul babbles quietly and a smile appears on their faces. "I think

she agrees,” Jisung muses gently.

Its quiet for a little bit expect for their daughters baby talk and the sound of chirping bird and the soft rustling of the wind.

“I want a good future,” Jisung says. Minho turns to look at him. Eunbyul waddles from Minho’s lap to only plonk herself in a dirt pile. “For everyone,” he adds on. “For everyone in The Capital, for our daughter... for us and the family we’ll have,”

Minho blinks at him. “We’re already a family,” he points out. “Yes,” Jisung agrees. “But... bigger,” he says softly.

“Eunbyul has taught me so much,” Jisung tells him. “How to love, how to find the joy in the littlest things. How much I love her and you...” Minho smiles softly. “If you want it too... I imagine a bigger family in our future. Eunbyul to have siblings to grow up with and play with,”

“I do want that,” Minho tells him. “But you... I thought that...” he bites down on his lip. “I think I’ve come to terms with that,” Jisung tells him softly. “I mean... I still will never forgive them for what they did... but now I have full control over my body and if I want to carry our babies that’s in our control,”

Minho reaches out for his hand. “We will make that future,” he promises. Its a ambitious thing to say being in the position they are in.

Jisung has always wanted to chase overmorrow and here they are, unsure if their plans will allow them to even see a tomorrow. But Minho promises they'll see overmorrow and weeks, months, years past it. Jisung will cling to that.

→

Chan watches as Felix stares at the wall blankly.

“Lixie,” he whispers out softly. The blonde boy turns from his spot staring at the blank pale green wall. “I just... when Jisung first said he wanted to go back to The Capital I was shocked because I thought we would finally have a peaceful life. Here in Mydar with no wars or no corrupt governments to control us,” his brown eyes are soft, glazed over with trepidation and Chan’s heart clenches in his chest.

He bundles him up in his arms and the younger rests his head on his shoulder, sucking in a deep breath. “But I said yes right away because it was Jisung.” Chan holds him tighter.

“And I would say yes again even if I knew what it really meant but... how the fuck are we supposed to do this? Hyunjin’s father? I wasn’t ready for that,”

“No one is,” Chan whispers. “And poor Hyunjin,” Felix lets out a sob. He’s always had a soft heart, made of pure sunshine that warms even on the darkest day. He’s not dimming, but its as if something is blocking the rays of his light from shining brightly. “Imagine how he feels now,”

“He’ll need time,” Chan says. He knows his friend. His mind will be going a million miles per hour. Valkyrie won’t leave his side and Chan is thankful for the Scalvian woman. She is fiercely protective of him and will do anything to make him feel better. Even if this situation has changed everything.

“What are we supposed to do now?”

Chan closes his eyes, sucking in a deep breath. “We do what we had planned,” Chan mutters. “We’ll take them down,”

→

Valkyrie’s fingers gently brush over Hyunjin’s lips, the coolness of the metal of his lip ring startles him when she tugs gently on it.

“You are never alone,” she whispers to him. Hyunjin’s eyes are glazed over, a faraway look across his face. Valkyrie’s cool hands on his warm cheeks blasts him back to reality. Her blue eyes are dimmed the slightest, covered in worry for him.

His heart tugs in his chest and he shuffles closer to her, his arms wrapping around her waist and pulling her closer until she’s sat in his lap.

“I know,” he mutters back, his face buried in the crook of her neck. “Do you want to say anything about it?” She asks gently.

Hyunjin breathes in heavily. “Only that I think I’m not as shocked as I think I should be in this situation,”

She pulls back and glances at him. He reaches out and runs his thumb down her plump bottom lip, feeling the metal slide against his skin. When they kiss now, the metal warms between their skin and gently clangs against each other’s ring. Sometimes it tugs and warmth spreads throughout their bodies.

“He’s not a good man, Valkyrie,” he frowns and she reaches up to smooth it out with her thumbs. “He did horrible things... you know. Making the disease and killing so many people. He did all those things to Jisung... I was shocked to hear he’s now the president but... I... had a feeling the disease had something to do with him,”

Hyunjin sighs, his hands falling to her hips where his thumbs rub circles against her clothed sides. “I’m his son,” he whispers out. “I never liked being his son but now...” he lets out a choked laugh. Valkyrie cups his cheeks. “I despise that,”

When Hyunjin sheds his first tear Valkyrie holds him close and sings a soft hymn under her breath.

→

“Eunbyul!” Minho screeches from the bathroom and Jisung perks up from where he was gathering her pyjamas.

Jisung pokes his head into the bathroom and laughs at the sight. Minho is drenched in water and Eunbyul is holding on a little watering can toy Isa gave to her after they went to visit the farms together.

Minho turns to him just as Eunbyul tips it over his head again, it’s empty this time and she plonks it down on his head. Minho sighs at her and shakes his head at Jisung.

“Dada,” she makes grabby hands for Jisung who giggles at her. He picks her up in the towel he’s holding and hugs her close. “Did you wet daddy?” He asks and she smiles, showing her little teeth. “Daddy,” she replies and Jisung laughs.

Minho grumbles and stands up after draining the bath.

Jisung turns to exit the bathroom and finds Hyunjin standing in the doorway. “Oh, Hyunjin?” The man smiles softly at them and Eunbyul waves hello to him. Hyunjin waves back at her and she laughs.

“I wanted to talk to you... but you’re busy so maybe I should come back later?”

“Nonsense,” Jisung scoffs. He passes Eunbyul off to Minho and smiles at the both of them. “Dada?”

“Dada will be back soon,” Minho tells her and kisses the top of her head.

Hyunjin leads Jisung to the community gardens where various flowers are blooming in the controlled atmosphere of the dome. Butterflies and bees float around in the large space, darting from flower to flower.

“You know because your his son that doesn’t mean you’re anything like him,” Jisung tells him softly. Hyunjin looks at him as if he’s wondering just how he knew that what he’s worried about. Jisung smiles at him gently.

“Just like I’ll never be like Youngho,” he adds on. Hyunjin ponders on that. Jisung is nothing like his father. They share nothing between them other than the same shade of hair and eyes. They have no similar quirks. If Hyunjin had never known Youngho is his father, he never would’ve guessed it. Hyunjin briefly wonders if that’s the same case with his father but he’s the splitting image of his father. He doesn’t think their personalities are similar but he wishes he didn’t look so much like his father.

“I’m so sorry for everything that he did to you... that I stood there and watched and didn’t do anything to help you all those times,” Hyunjin lets it out in one big breath. Jisung’s face softens and he shakes his head, reaching out for his hands. He squeezes them gently, reassuringly.

“You don’t have to apologise for anything he did.” Jisung tells him. “You don’t need to apologise to yourself either... we both didn’t have

a choice in the matter,”

Hyunjin blinks. Jisung is right. All those times he was ordered to observe what his father did in the Institution wasn't a choice for him. The look in his fathers eyes whenever he announced him to come along wasn't one that Hyunjin knew he could reject.

“I... I did want to come here to talk about the plans... to take down The Capital,” Hyunjin whispers out then.

Jisung cocks his head at him, but doesn't say anything, waiting for his friend to speak first.

“My father...” his brows contort, “he's the president now so... he wronged you and Seungmin, Felix and Jeongin and all those other boys. The innocents lives he destroyed throughout The Capital... but we wouldn't be here now if it weren't for you,”

Jisung still feels a little odd having all the credit of this revolt pushed against him, but he knows that it was him. And if he hadn't said anything none of this would've happened. Instead of denying it like he has in the past, he nods, allowing for Hyunjin to continue.

“I know this isn't... its not easy to talk about I guess, but I... we need to discuss his downfall in particular,” His voice trails off and Jisung swallows thickly, suddenly nervous.

“I can't kill him,” he says, his voice breaking. “And I won't ask

anyone else to because he's not worth living out the rest of our lives branded as a murderer,"

"So what's your idea?"

Jisung had never planned on ever killing anyone. He didn't want to act the same way they did and ruin everything. Death wasn't the answer.

"We capture him and all his dogs," Hyunjin says. "They can live a life not worth living. The ultimate price,"

"In a prison?" Jisung asks. As someone who has experienced just what Hyunjin plans for these people, he feels something unknown shoot up his spine. He's not fearful of it or exactly happy for anyone to go through something so similar but... for the people that have caused the world to be in such a disarray and so corrupt, Jisung thinks its only fair.

Hyunjin nods his head.

"Good," Jisung whispers out. "That's good,"

"You really think so?" Hyunjin looks at him for confirmation. Jisung nods. "I think it works..."

Hyunjin's tongue pokes out of his mouth and slides over his lip ring.

“Then thats settled?”

Jisung nods his head. He squeezes his friends hand and gives him a gentle smile. “We will get through this Hyunjin,” he tells him softly.

“I know,” Hyunjin smiles back. “We always have come out the other side,”

Notes for the Chapter:

Hiii I'm so sorry I've been Mia for so long and honestly it's a really long story but I'm not doing well. I love this story and I haven't given up on it and I hope you guys won't give up on me and this story either. I can't promise regular updates anymore since I can't control the situation I'm currently in but just know this will be finished one day and I won't leave you guys hanging. Writing is a safe place for me and I really want to continue posting fics after this one is done.

Lots of love - starsprout xxx

They all sit in their lounge room, starring at the model that haunts too many of them.

“We should be thinking of making plans,” Minho whispers, breaking the comfortable silence that fell over them.

“We should,” Chan agrees quietly. “But it’s a little... a bit different now,”

“How is it different?” Hyunjin mutters. “If it’s because of my dad—nothing has changed. Don’t worry about details like that. We will continue as if this doesn’t change anything because it doesn’t,”

Valkyrie rubs his arm and Seungmin shoots him a worried look.

“Please,” he begs quieter. “I don’t want to dwell on it anymore either,”

“Look,” Chan breathes out. “I know things have changed,” he gives Hyunjin a look. “But we can’t just ignore it because it’s important to our goal, right?” Hyunjin gulps and sighs loudly.

“We need a solid plan,” Minho speaks up. “To somehow get in without them noticing too much,”

“Do you have any ideas?” Seungmin asks him and Minho nods his head, a soft smile playing on his lips. “Like the first time we broke in... we used technology to get in... more like it failing but either way most of The Capital’s features are run on tech and a few power plants that are obviously going to have signals,”

“That you can get into and destroy it from inside out?” Jeongin raises a brow at him and smiles. “Can you do that?”

Minho folds his arms over his chest and hums, nodding. “It might require me getting close enough to secure the signals well enough into our system to break it apart... and we’d need to make a whole new signal so they can’t track down our signals from the main system... otherwise it could potentially backfire and blow us all up,”

“Ah,” Valkyrie mutters with a grimace.

“And then how are we going to organise the liberation of the citizens?” Fern asks where she’s seated on the lounge, Eunbyul curled asleep in her lap.

“We have a large fleet...” Jisung murmurs. “We should go into the slums first and try to save as many people as we can from there... who knows what conditions they’re living in now.”

“Organising ships to fill up with refugees... The Capital’s population is around five million, right?” Isa asks and Hyunjin confirms that.

Its not the biggest settlement of humans in this age—The City of Sivra tops all numbers significantly. The main city is as large as The Capital and its surrounding minor cities and towns span out across the desert, enough to comfortably fit all of Mydar and the smaller settlements like Sunsen and Hava.

With ships from both Rava and Mydar, they should have enough to fill them to their maximum capacity to carry out all the refugees safely.

“And we’ll need teams... on the ground to help them in and guard them... and then obviously to get those boys out of the institution,”

“We have enough forces,” Fern says confidently.

“They will kill,” Changbin whispers. “They’ll try to kill as many innocents and as many of the opposing forces—us—as they can. That’s what they’re like,”

“Then we’ll have to be prepared,” Isa mutters under her breath. A frown is marred between her shapely eyebrows, her eyes narrowed.

“The combined armoury inventory we have is quite excessive...” Fern mentions. “We should have enough to go around to all the teams on the ground,”

“Right... and the field team of doctors will be well equipped. I’ve checked our inventory personally,” Hyunjin mentions. “There’s enough for the hospital back here, a main medical ship is probably our best bet,”

“Then that checks out,” Minho mutters.

“We should consult the council to approve all of these new details,” Isa stands, brushing off her hands on her hips wrapped in a long yellow piece of fabric.

Fern passes Eunbyul off to Jisung who cradles her close to his chest as she sleeps.

“And to get more details of certain things,” Fern smiles gently at them all.

“You have done well,” she whispers to them and this time, unlike most of her smiles, it reaches her eyes. Her green eyes sparkle in the natural light from the skylight above her and Jisung stares up at her warmth surging in his chest.

→

“I have an idea,” Minho shoots up in their bed startling Jisung and Eunbyul who were dozing off while cuddling.

He clears his throat and flashes a sheepish smile to them. Jisung only snorts and pats Eunbyul's back, lulling her back to sleep. Minho watches her as her cheeks puff out against Jisung's shoulder and how her eyes flutter shut just as she lets out a little yawn, her little hands clinging onto Jisung's shirt.

"Well," Jisung shifts a little, his fingers brushing through the soft brown curls of Eunbyul's hair.

"I'm sorry," he whispers, his eyes fluttering as he talks.

It had been a long day with Eunbyul. She had been unusually clingy and fussy, refusing to go down for her naps. Jisung held her for most of the day since she cried whenever she wasn't in his arms. She wouldn't even calm for Minho which disheartened him a little bit when she screamed, reaching for Jisung but he could never be upset with her wanting Jisung to comfort her.

"I'm really tired and I'm not sure if I'd take anything in..." Jisung whispers softly, a guilty look on his face. Minho hums softly, kisses his cheek and settles back into bed.

"In the morning," he says. "When we're all well rested then I'll explain it,"

"Sounds good," Jisung puts Eunbyul in her bassinet next to their bed. He's glad Mother Barbada had made a big enough basket for her to fit into even past one, especially when she had a rough day.

“Sleep well, darling,” Jisung presses a soft kiss to her forehead and watches her sleep soundly before he allows himself to fall asleep.

→

The night does not go smoothly.

Minho wakes up when the moon is high in the sky to Jisung pacing around their room, trying to calm a whimpering Eunbyul.

Jisung turns to him when Minho pulls himself quickly out of bed and Minho rushes over to him.

“Sungie,” he calls out when he sees his tear streaked face and how Eunbyul is clinging to him, crying quietly.

“I think she’s sick, Minho, I tried everything— I even— I,” he turns into a blubbering mess, tears spilling out of his eyes. Minho outstretches a hand to touch Eunbyul’s forehead and gasps. “She has a fever,” he whispers and Jisung looks like he’s going to break down. “Hey, hey she’s gonna be okay, here,” he takes her from Jisung and this time, she doesn’t fuss and cuddles against him, pulling at his shirt softly.

“I know baby,” he brushes her hair, her cries muffling when her face

buries against his shoulder.

“Come on,” he pulls on Jisung’s hand and leads them out of the room.

Jisung calms himself down a little bit as they walk and Minho speaks to the both of them softly. He recalls how his own mother would tenderly care for him when he caught colds when the seasons changed. She would tuck him in after doses of medicine his father brought in a hurry.

It’s memories like these, little things that are so humane that makes Minho think of her. And when he thinks of her now, all he feels is this bitter anger. This hatred for the place that killed his mother and so many others for nothing but power and destruction.

Minho agreed that The Capital had to go down. Ever since Jisung first mentioned it. But he had never truly understood the extent of Jisung’s resentment. He knew he was mad— rightfully so— but Minho had no idea that this anger that he feels now was possible.

He thought maybe it was humane to try to do it the least messy as possible but now all Minho wants to see is dust.

Flooding his senses, breathing it into his lungs as his eyes burn at the crumbling city, his skin covered in destruction.

Hyunjin pokes his head out of his door as soon as Minho knocks on

the door. Mother Barbada had taught a few tips to Jisung if she was ever to fall ill and Minho knows Jisung tried them all already. Hyunjin is their best bet and Minho couldn't care less about his friend's sleepy eyes when their daughter is burning against him.

"Please help," Jisung mutters, eyes pleading. Hyunjin steps aside and ushers them in.

"She has a fever," Minho tells him quickly. Hyunjin holds out his hands for her and Minho passes her off. "Ah, that she does," he gnaws on his bottom lip, hurrying away into the lounge room where his medical kit is kept for the time being.

Valkyrie comes padding down the hallway, her hair unbound and falling in loose curls. "Go back to sleep, Val," Hyunjin tells her softly but her eyes are concerned when she looks at the anxious parents and Eunbyul in Hyunjin's hold.

Instead, she turns to Jisung and Minho. "I'll make some tea," she hurries away and Jisung can faintly hear running water.

"Has she thrown up at all?" Hyunjin asks Jisung. Minho sleeps like a rock and he's ashamed he hadn't woken earlier. Jisung hears anything if it concerns Eunbyul, which everyone finds quite amusing but now Minho is glad he had heard her.

She's never been a loud crier and a sick Eunbyul is even quieter, like she has no energy left but it's all she can do to express that she doesn't feel good.

“A few,” Jisung confirms and Minho rubs his neck. “I tried to bring it down by giving her a bath and that’s when it started,”

“She’s going to be fine, okay?” Hyunjin reassures Jisung when he picks the anxious tone in his voice. “Okay,” Jisung replies croakily. Minho holds him close.

“I’ll give her some medicine now, he gently passes her back to Jisung. “Has she threw up a lot? She might need a drip...”

“A drip?” Minho frowns. “I don’t know if she’d do well,”

“Babies get dehydrated fast,” Hyunjin comments. “It might be necessary,” he tells them.

“Considering how small she is I’d say it was a lot,” Jisung replies. “I was just about to come to you when she threw up and I panicked a little. Then Minho dragged us here,”

“Next time come straight away,” Hyunjin smiles at him, a syringe between his fingers. “Byul,” he sings softly, popping the tip in her mouth and giving her the dosage.

“Poor baby looks exhausted,” Hyunjin brushes her hair and watches as her eyelids flutter. “I think I should get the drip ready,”

“Okay,” Jisung agrees just as Valkyrie comes back with a pot of tea

and several cups in one hand all hanging off another one of her fingers.

“Peppermint,” she says. “It soothes the stomach and relaxes,” she pauses while she pours a cup and hands it to Jisung. “And repels rats,”

“Wonderful,” Minho deadpans.

Hyunjin chuckles softly as he exits to retrieve things from the medical bay.

“Why do you know that?” Jisung peers over the top of his cup. Valkyrie shrugs. “My grandmother. Scalva isn’t like Mydar and immune to rats... pesky things once destroyed twenty bags of grain in one night when I was little. We had to live off fish, turnips, whatever we could hunt and blood bread,”

“Blood bread?” Jisung stares at her. Valkyrie nods softly. “I suppose you’ve never heard of that,”

“No,” he confirms. “Sounds quite interesting,”

Valkyrie does quite a good job in distracting Jisung while Hyunjin’s gone for the supplies needed for Eunbyul. Minho listens in and learns the method to make blood bread and how to braid hair. Jisung watches intently and Minho pays careful attention, quietly mapping it in his head for the future so he can braid Eunbyul’s hair for her.

Hyunjin comes back before Jisung finishes his second cup of tea. Eunbyul is barely awake in his arms, just laying in her fathers arms, exhausted and too warm.

“I don’t think she’s going to react much,” Jisung mumbles just as Hyunjin sets everything up and reaches for her hand. “I’ll wrap her hand after too just so she doesn’t hurt herself by accident in her sleep,” Hyunjin tucks a bandage between his knees and scoots close. Valkyrie helps by setting the bag up to the pole, making sure its connected properly before Hyunjin gently interests the iv line.

She only cries out softly before settling back down. “Good girl,” Hyunjin praises her softly, patting her tummy gently. “Do you want to sleep here just to be close?” Hyunjin asks and Valkyrie waits for their answer. “I’ll stay,” Jisung nods. “Minho needs to sleep. He’s got an idea that he needs to start working on in the morning,”

“Okay,” Hyunjin turns to Minho who smiles softly. “I won’t be fair, either,” he kisses them both on their foreheads and waves goodbye to his friends. “Thank you, guys,”

“No worries. I’d wake up for you guys anytime,” minho laughs at Hyunjin before he slips away.

Jisung hadn’t even noticed Valkyrie slip away, but she suddenly appears with a few blankets and a soft looking pillow in her arms. “If you need us we’re one knock away,” she reminds, setting up a little bed on the lounge for Jisung and Eunbyul to share.

“Thank you both so much,” Jisung lays Eunbyul down who’s fast asleep now. “Of course,” Valkyrie smiles softly. “Take it easy tomorrow,”

→

They’re all seated in the lounge room, around the model of the institution after breakfast in the morning.

Eunbyul is still asleep in Jisung’s hold, her drip still in her hand. Thankfully, her fever had broken sometime in the night. Hyunjin says she’s most likely exhausted from the whole ordeal of last night.

“You mentioned you have an idea?” Changbin turns to Minho who’s gazing around at them with a rather nervous look to him.

“Uh... yeah,” he says. “Before I say anything, does anyone else have anything? Anything at all?”

“Other than what we already have... nothing,” Seungmin admits and everyone nods in response, not having anything to add.

“Okay then,” Minho breathes out rather shakily.

“You seem nervous,” Felix pipes up and Minho blinks at him. “Oh uh... it’s just... I don’t think it’s a plan that we’d all agree on. I

mean... I don't even like it," he peers over a Jisung for a second who is staring at him, his head slightly cocked as he watches him intently.

"We have nothing else," Chan says softly. "We need a plan. And something that'll work,"

"Oh this will work," Minho assures him but then he gulps. "I hope,"

"God, you've made it seem so climatic," Changbin laughs out, trying to lighten up the situation.

"It's about the institution,"

Minho looks over at Jisung and shoots him a worried gaze.

Jisung's mouth parts as he realises exactly what Minho is implying and he holds Eunbyul a little closer to his chest.

"No way," Seungmin breathes out, his eyes widening.

→

When the day finally comes where they're fitted for armour, it suddenly sinks into Jisung just what they're about to do.

He's wanted it for so long but something gnaws deep inside him. He looks at his daughter wobbling on her feet around his legs as the bulletproof vest is fitted against his chest with adjustable straps.

He has wanted this ever since he was perched up on the wall, staring at Chan with his arms outstretched to him, telling him to jump. Jump to his freedom.

Like a festering wound, it grew and grew, becoming something almost carnal. But he hadn't known of Eunbyul's presence nestled inside of him then. He didn't understand the risk of his life and what it meant.

Now, he's risking not just his own life, not just his friends but he's risking Eunbyul's and her parents. The people she needs to thrive and survive in such a broken down world.

He won't back down, that's for sure. They've put everything they've had into this moment that's creeping closer and closer each passing second.

He meets with Felix at the base of Mydar, in the camp where training sessions continue. Their plan is secure, formidable almost. The last fragments of their foolproof plan have to be relied on by hope alone.

Jisung once thought hope was useless and it would just disappoint you and kill you quicker, hurting more in the process.

And then came the days where he slept beneath the blanket of twinkling stars, his own star drumming softly inside of him.

“Overmorrow,” he whispers to himself and Eunbyul who’s perched on his hip stumbles out the word after him. Although it sounds something closer to ‘omorrow’ it makes a smile bloom across his face as he presses a kiss to her cheek.

For everyone else in this world, stuck in a land where overmorrow isn’t a familiar concept. Where they can’t fight back because of tyranny. For the sun to peak over the horizon and burn into his skin like the first morning on the run in seven years. No more stark white lights, no more deafening cracks of gunfire.

Felix waves at him and Jisung rushes over to his best friend.

“Why did you want to come out here again?” Jisung asks him as Felix reaches for his baby. Eunbyul happily goes to her uncle and gives him a big hug, mumbling a soft, “Fefe,” Felix’s eyes widen at her and Jisung laughs loudly, clapping his hands.

“Who am I?” Felix points to himself and Eunbyul points back at him. “Fefe!”

“Oh, you clever girl!” Felix cheers, ecstatic to have a nickname from Eunbyul before anyone else except for her parents. Jisung claps his friend on his back and kisses Eunbyul’s head. “She’s getting too big,” he sighs.

Felix pouts at him and cuddles the one-year-old tightly. “I know,” he pouts back. “I guess we’ll just have to have more, then,” he says matter of factly and smiles lightly.

“Oh?” Felix raises a brow at him. He gestures for him to come walk with him and they do just that, heading out for the meadow on the outskirts of the campsite.

“Here I was thinking you were opposed to the idea all along?” Felix says softly and Jisung hums. “I was,” he agrees. “But then I had Eunbyul,” he whispers and she turns to look at him when he says her name. He brushes his fingers through her brown locks and she relaxes against Felix’s shoulder, her eyelids slowly fluttering.

“And I was confused after that. I didn’t like how... I could get pregnant... it’ll always stay with me but then I fell in love and raising her with Minho feels so... right,” he tells his friend honestly and Felix gives him one of those soft smiles— the same ones that won his trust over within the first few days of meeting him.

“Somewhere peaceful... full of nature maybe? A place for our family to grow bigger...” Jisung whispers in a dreamy tone.

“You want more than one more?” Felix questions and Jisung shrugs. “I don’t really know,” he admits. “I think... I think I want more than one more,”

“Depends on the pregnancy and birth for me,” Felix then says. Jisung

looks over at his friend. It was no secret that Felix has always wanted to have a child, but Jisung didn't know about his apprehension towards it.

"You know seeing you go through it really showed me it definitely isn't easy,"

"Hey... we we're going through a lot," he reminds. "We we're pushing boundaries humans shouldn't do, let alone a pregnant person... it wasn't that bad," he tries to say but Felix grimaces at him.

"I just... you couldn't see yourself everyday... when you were getting bigger but not putting on any weight... you looked so tired and like the wind could knock you over... and when you went into labour. I thought I was going to watch you bleed out... and her... I thought there was no way you'd both survive once you said she hadn't moved,"

"Felix," Jisung whispers out softly, reaching out for his friend's free hand. "Why haven't you ever told me?"

Felix shrugs. "We did briefly after you woke up, remember?"

"I guess, but—"

"It's not that deep," Felix cuts him off. "It was just... an eye opener."

“The medical care around here is top-notch,” Jisung mutters. “If we had been here even an hour before that would’ve gone a lot different. You will be fine, I promise,”

“That’s if we survive, Sungie,” Felix whispers. Jisung’s heart stutters in his chest at his friend’s quiet voice.

“Is this what this is about?” Jisung questions him softly. He grips tighter on Felix’s hand and turns to face him. Felix peers down at the ground.

“We could die, Jisung,”

Jisung opens his mouth, to try to comfort his friend, to say that nothing bad will come of them, but he can’t.

“I won’t let you,” he whispers. Felix tries to smile. “I wanted to just talk to you, like old times. When it was just us lagging behind at the back. Sleeping together and helping each other out. Those are days that I’d rather not relive but I’m thankful for every little thing during that time. How you trusted me after being taken advantage of for so long,” Felix has tears in his eyes as he speaks. When he blinks, his eyelashes catch in the wetness and tears finally drip from his lashes, rolling down his freckled cheeks.

“You’re my best friend,” Jisung tells him, reaching his other hand up to wipe his tears from his face. Felix smiles at him. “And you are mine,” he whispers back.

“We will come out of this,” Jisung tells him, confidence is laced in his tone.

“You’re so confident?” Felix asks him, genuinely surprised at the sudden change in his friends usual pessimistic behaviour.

“I doubt they’ll hurt me,” Jisung looks at his sleeping daughter and gently presses a hand against his abdomen.

“I have the last thing needed for our plan,” Jisung tells him. “They’ll figure it out. They spent years waiting for a birth. They’ll know the signs of one.”

“You really think that’ll be what saves you?”

“Something tells me its that shallow,” Jisung mutters and Felix presses his lips together before he gives a single nod.

“They’ll try to use you,” Felix whispers softly and Jisung lowers his head at the worry in Felix’s tone. “They will,” he confirms.

→

Minho has gone out to organise a team of technicians for a project they need to make before they can even think about sending their

fleets to The Capital.

Jisung is bathing Eunbyul, pouring water over her head as she picks up the soap suds in her chubby little hands and tries to throw them at him. They don't go far and she had discovered earlier that it was more fun than eating them.

She splashes around for a bit until Jisung gets her out, wanting to get to bed soon since its been a long few days of planning and sorting details out. She waddles around, escaping from her towel and tries to climb back into the now emptying bath.

"Silly girl," Jisung laughs as he pulls on her little night dress and a nappy. "There! How do you feel?" He kisses her cheeks. "You look like a little princess!" He coos at her, picking her up and twirling around. She laughs loudly and wriggles in his hold.

She has too much energy for him to even try to put her down so he brings her out to the lounge room, putting her down on the floor and opening a crate behind a lounge and retrieving some of her toys.

He plays with her for awhile, Eunbyul trying her best to run as he chases her. She looks like a tiny penguin waddling away and Jisung finds it too cute and has to keep his squeals down as he scoops her up. She screams loudly, laughing and kicking her legs in excitement.

He sits down on the lounge with her, seeing if she's let out enough energy yet. She climbs onto his lap and bangs her teddy on his chest, pouting. "Bottle?" He asks and she bangs the teddy again. He laughs at her response and mere minutes later she's happily laying in his

arms, drinking away.

There's a noise of footsteps and Jisung freezes, holding Eunbyul tighter. His friends weren't coming over tonight, all having the same plans of getting a good night's rest. Fern and Isa were busy with Minho and a few other preparations.

Jisung slowly rises from the lounge, holding Eunbyul against him.

But when he stands up and peers about a meter behind the lounge he finds a small figure crouched down, staring up at him.

"Jaemin?" He frowns at her, his nerves instantly settling and he loosens his grip on his daughter.

"Hi," she says softly.

"What—what are you doing here?" He asks her, baffled to why his little sister is sitting on his lounge room's floor. Which the entrance to is sealed by a password only a few people know. Eunbyul's birthday.

"I saw you press the numbers," she says and Jisung gapes. "Five times," she says, proud of herself. "I miss you." She says. "And I want to see you more. You're my brother but you're not like my friends' brothers," she tells him.

"Here, let's sit together," Jisung gestures to the lounge and she

bounds up, skipping and plonking herself on the lounge. Jisung sits next to her and Eunbyul watches Jaein carefully as she drinks her nighttime bottle.

“What... what do you mean I’m not like your friends brothers?”

“Their brothers live with them,” Jaein says blandly. “And none of them have babies too,” Jisung blinks at her, unsure of what to say.

“Dad says you named me but I don’t remember that,” Jisung smiles softly. “Because you were a baby,” he tells her. “Eunbyul’s a baby,” Jaein comments and Jisung nods at her. “Does that mean she won’t remember being a baby?”

“I think so,” Jisung hums. He’s a little confused to what she’s doing here, but its clear she wants to talk and he doesn’t have the heart to not let her do that. Even if he’s sleepy and Eunbyul is growing tired in his arms.

“Mummy and daddy didn’t talk about you much,” she suddenly says after brief silence. Jisung looks at her, his gaze soft as he takes in the girls expression. She looks... confused to say the least.

“But when mummy got sick she cried for daddy to find you.” Jisung’s mouth feels dry at his sisters words. “Dad promised her that he would find you... did you run away? Sometimes when I got in trouble I wanted to run away but I was too scared,”

Jisung doesn't know what to say.

"Jaein," he says quietly. "I didn't—" he stops himself from talking. He doesn't want to ruin her innocent view on her parents. She didn't need to know that her father is the bad guy in Jisung's mind.

"You know how Eunbyul is my baby?" she nods and looks at the baby falling asleep in her fathers arms. "Do you know what that means?"

"That you had a baby?" She asks, confused. Jisung gulps. "Yes but... do you know where she came from?"

"A mummy's tummy?" She says softly, gazing up at him. "That's where mummy said I came from and so did all my friends,"

"Ah... well Eunbyul came from my tummy," he tells her gently. He expects her to be confused but all she says is, "Oh," then she cocks her head at him. "So are you Eunbyul's mummy?"

"No..." he shifts his daughter in his arms. "I'm a boy," Jaein only looks more confused. "When I was a little bit older than you I went to this... this place," he tries to explain. "And they made me able to have babies,"

"So then you had Eunbyul?" Her eyes shine at the information. Jisung hums. "After a long time there,"

“When you met Minho? Because he’s her other daddy?” Jisung shakes his head softly. “She was in my tummy when I left. Before I met Minho,”

“Oh, but why?”

“I don’t know why,” he tells her. “But you left to go there?” She frowns at him. “It’s complicated,” Jisung smiles at her. He had tried to let her know why he was absent... to try to make her understand that he was gone for a long time because he was busy. It was better for her this way, he wants to keep her childhood clear of the traumatic past he’s had.

“You didn’t want to?” She asks further.

“Why did you come here?” He changes the topic quickly. “Did you tell your father where you were going?”

“He’s our dad,” She reminds him. “Why do you never call him that?” Jisung’s stomach falls.

“Maybe ask him instead,” he tells her. He knows Youngho wouldn’t tell her the truth. Whether he was ashamed of admitting his past or if he, like Jisung wants to protect her innocence. Either way, it’s the easiest way out for both of them.

“Mummy called out your name when she was dying,” Jaein says suddenly. Jisung feels sick as she speaks. “I remember. She said sorry

and that she did love you,”

Jisung would laugh if it was anyone else telling him this, but his little sister is looking up at him with such... admiration and wonder.

He wonders why she's speaking so easily about death like this, but then he recalls how she too had grown up in the slums where the disease was rampant. She has witnessed far too much death for a little girl. "I thought I should say that," she whispers softly. Her eyes flicker down to Eunbyul and she smiles softly. "The baby is sleeping," she whispers.

Jisung looks down to find her cheek squished against his chest, her lips pouty and her long lashes brushing her chubby cheeks. He smiles and rubs her back softly.

"Come on," he says to Jaein, reaching out a hand for her to hold.

"Let's take you back to your father," After all, he's already lost one child.

Notes for the Chapter:

Another update bc last one was short and I have several finished chapters saved up atm <3

Eunbyul gives me baby fever so bad omg and Valkyrie is my favourite seriously she's so fun to

write and I just can imagine her so clearly I love her.

53. 52→

“We have a potential problem is our flawless plan,” Jeongin announces loudly. They’re sitting in Fern and Isa’s lounge room that’s been turned into a meeting room.

“Please continue,” Isa tells him with an arched brow, half at Jeongin’s choice of words and the ‘potential hole’ in their plan.

“Minho pinged in to say they found more than one signal connecting to The Capital,” he continues and Changbin grits his teeth beside Jisung. “And he requests to call—oh nevermind he’s on it,”

Fern answers the call and Minho’s voice fills the room. Eunbyul gets excited at the sound of her father’s voice.

“Minho, how does everything look?” Fern asks him and he groans softly from the other end of the call. “Not too great... I wasn’t expecting five main signals to work with,” he admits. “So what exactly does that mean,”

“Each signal is a power source that leads into a whole bunch of different networks that control things around The Capital... that’s easy enough to break them down at the root, the problem is that is definitely suspicious and it could cause our cover to be blown early.”

“Okay, but if we cut out the signals, what does that mean for us?”

“Their main source of power will be gone. Lights will go out, online networks will go out so password activated doors and such will be easier to break into. Computer controls will be down,”

“That gives us the upper hand that we need,” Seungmin adds. “Definitely,” Minhø confirms.

“So we wait,” Jeongin shrugs. They all agree that it’s the best option. Breaking into the signals what break their cover too quickly if they did it now but if they did it just as they were about to storm in... theoretically it would turn out in their favour. And any tilt on their side is definitely going to be needed.

Minhø reassures them that since he knows the signal codes it will be a quick process for him to shut down the signals and with an added smile in Jisung’s direction he promises to arrive back to Mydar quickly.

Jisung decides to take Eunbyul on a walk outside while they wait for Minhø to arrive.

Eunbyul is wearing a sun hat that ties under her chin, her brown curls framing her face as he waddles around in tiny shoes that Fern got her as soon as she began to walk. Jisung likes watching her fumble around, a little wobbly on her legs and sometimes she falls, but she never cries. She sticks her butt out as she gets back to her feet and Jisung teaches her how to dust herself off so now every time she stands she makes sure to dust off her knees.

Jisung picks a wild flower growing nearby the camps and tucks it

behind her ear, smiling at her. Eunbyul coos loudly and claps her hands, throwing herself at her father in a hug. Jisung laughs loudly with her and for the next few minutes Jisung weaves little flower crowns— a tiny one to sit around his daughters head and a bigger one for himself. Eunbyul thinks it the best thing ever and can't stop laughing.

Sometime during their flower crown making Youngho made his way over to them.

Jisung turns when he hears the rustling in the taller grass behind them and immediately pulls Eunbyul into his arms as he stands swiftly. His father looks down at him and Jisung can only blink as he tries to settle his building anger.

“Why are you so persistent?” Jisung hisses out. Eunbyul snuggles into his shoulder and he cups the back of her head. He tries to walk away, making a beeline to where he can see Valkyrie pondering about in the camp with some other women from Scalva. Youngho finds Valkyrie intimidating and barely goes anywhere near the young woman. But Youngho steps in front of him, eyes pleading.

“Please just this once... I... just this once please hear me out?”

Jisung's jaw tenses but he stops, swaying softly when Eunbyul whines in his arms. She calms quickly and Jisung gulps. “A few minutes,” he grumbles and Youngho's eyes light up at that.

“Jaein told me that she visited you last night,” Jisung doesn't say anything. He knew Jaein would tell him. She doesn't think of him in the same way Jisung does and Jisung wants nothing less than to not change that. He wants her to grow up with a caring father, in a space

where she doesn't have to hate and ache.

"Jaein... she needs someone good in her life," Youngho mutters out. "She needs a good person to look up to... to want to be like. I... I can't be that person for her,"

Jisung feels fury climb up his throat and it comes up before he can stop it. "So you're going to give up on another kid?" He spits out. "Is that what you're trying to do? Get rid of all your children and make them hate you?"

"That's what I deserve!"

"Shut up," Jisung hisses at him. Eunbyul whines at the sudden anger in his tone and he holds her tighter, knocking her again. "You cannot give up on that girl. Do not give up on that girl. Pour all your energy and love into that girl and never let her down. Don't make her hate you. Don't give her the option to even think about hating you. It's not a path I would've chosen for myself," he breathes out and Youngho's eyes glisten with tears.

"And don't think I can be that good person she needs," Jisung mutters. "You might think you know me, but you know absolutely nothing about me. Do not give up on her,"

It's a command. He's not asking him to take care of his little sister, he's telling him. With a final glare, he slips away, pressing kisses to his daughters' cheeks to calm her down.

He spots Valkyrie again, now alone outside a tent, looking at something in a book. It's probably something to do with amour for the others and the weapon management. He makes his way over to her, frowning when a man around Odin's age stands before her and blocks his view of her. Jisung forgets that she's not a large person and most people from Scalva are built large and sturdy. He picks up his pace a bit, cupping onto the back of Eunbyul's skull as he begins to run.

"Hey," he calls out as he appears from beside the older man. Valkyrie's eyes are wide and relief washes over her icy eyes when she sees Jisung.

"Piss off, we were sorting something out, weren't we Valkyrie?" He narrows his eyes at Valkyrie and outright ignores Jisung. "I do not recall having anything to sort out?" She spits back. Jisung slowly makes his way to Valkyrie's side.

"I do believe so. In particular the deal you broke of with me. You were meant to marry my son, carry the next lines of our families not be responsible for his death!" Jisung's stomach twists. He stand in front of his friend, passing his daughter to her. Eunbyul whines at the loss of her father touch, but is happy enough when she realises its Valkyrie holding her.

"Hey," Jisung narrows his eyes at the man. He towers over him, a similar size to Odin but Jisung will not allow this old man threaten his friend. "If I remember correctly it was your son who broke the sacred rules of marriage and took someone else to his home," he doesn't dare continue on with the sentence. He doesn't like to remember the moments of that house and the heavy axe which lead to his shoulder popping out. The man grits his teeth.

“I said you’d pay, girl,” he reaches out a hand, fast and it files past Jisung’s head.

Eunbyul cries out as he grips her around her arm and Jisung’s blood turns to molten lava in his veins. He’s attacking the man before he can even think about it, punching him against his nose. Blood gushes out and the man yelps, but Jisung kicks his foot up and lands a strong kick right where the sun doesn’t shine. The man goes down with a groan and Jisung pulls at the knife he keeps on his hip. He had never thought he’d use it in Mydar, but here it is, the blade at the mans throat.

“No one,” he grits out. “Touches my daughter,”

The commotion alerts the camp and Jisung hears Hyunjin’s voice over the crowd. Jisung looks back to see Valkyrie cradling Eunbyul who’s sobbing, her bottom lip wobbly. Valkyrie looks terrified herself.

Hyunjin rushes to them, taking in the scene. He helps Jisung up, staring down at the man. “He grabbed Eunbyul,” Jisung hisses out, sliding his knife back where it belongs before hurrying to his daughter who instantly reaches out for him. He takes her and cradles her against his chest, bouncing softly and kissing her forehead softly as he mumbles to her. She calms quickly with him but the bubble of anger in his chest doesn’t subside even after she’s calm.

In the time it took for her to calm, Odin and Changbin had showed up. Odin currently in a heated argument with Bjarne’s father and Hyunjin is comforting a rather shaken up Valkyrie.

“Valkyrie, I’m so sorry I didn’t know who he was—“ Jisung tries to apologise but she shakes her head. “It’s not your fault,” she tells him, looking at Eunbyul who’s sucking on her thumb, falling asleep against Jisung.

“It... he was always like this. Father like son,” she tries to smile but it doesn’t reach her eyes. Jisung was aware she didn’t have a good history with Bjarne. After being held hostage by him for some time, Jisung knows that she hadn’t escaped unscathed from him.

“It’s complicated,” she whispers then, reading the look on his face. Jisung nods softly. He doesn’t want her to feel pressured to talk. It had taken himself a long time to finally open up to the people he was closest to. He understands.

“Let’s head back inside, yeah?” Hyunjin begins to lead them all in. Jisung goes to bathe Eunbyul, washing off the dirt from the playing in the fields while Hyunjin and Valkyrie sit in silence together in their room.

Valkyrie silently comes to lay against Hyunjin, sitting softly in his lap.

“He used to hit me,” she says softly. Her fingers play with the hair at the back of Hyunjin’s head. It’s getting long and Valkyrie thinks he’ll either need a haircut before the battle or she’ll braid it to keep it neat and out of the way.

Hyunjin holds her softly like he usually does, so gentle and sweet. "I'm a warrior," she says. "I was born with it flowing in my blood, I was born to be who I am, but he didn't like that. Didn't like that I had a mind of my own. That I could fight and I took down kills larger than his in half the time. He didn't like the way I carried myself. I don't know why he thought violence would change me... it made me scared and feel weak to be afraid around him but I didn't stop being a warrior. I hunted more. Escaped more. Stayed away from him. I made him mad by just being myself. That's why I also ran. I wanted to get away, maybe bring back a snow lion to just torment him or something. Then I met you... that was good."

"I knew he was dangerous but I didn't know he was insane enough to take Jisung,"

Her fear was genuine back then. She hadn't expected him to do something so evil, something that would get him shunned if he was caught, but he had just taken him... just like that. But Jisung was a fighter, just like her.

Valkyrie watched that night. Perched high in a pine tree as snow lions danced around him, stalked him until he grew exhausted before they struck. No one had questioned where she went that night.

Hyunjin is gentle, soft. He's not a born warrior like Valkyrie is, he heals with those hands, fixes. He will fight for his friends, the people he loves. He'll do anything he can to get through this, to help. And Valkyrie will be right there, sword ready by his side.

→

Minho arrives shortly after dinner and Eunbyul reaches for him as soon as she spots him. Minho kisses her cheeks in a greeting and then Eunbyul reaches one arm out for Jisung, wanting to be held by the

both of them at the same time. Jisung knows she's going to be clingy all night and probably won't sleep as well as she usually does but Jisung can't blame her. "It's been a long day," Jisung sighs as Minho raises an eyebrow at their daughters odd behaviour. "Eat and then I'll tell you,"

Knowing Minho, he'd want to go punch the man's head in and Jisung can't say he wouldn't stop him. Rather, he might go with him and help.

Eunbyul lays against Jisung's chest where he's sat on the lounge, twirling her soft curls between his fingers. She's still small enough to fit comfortably against him and Jisung knows he's going to cry when she doesn't fit against him anymore.

Minho scoffs down his dinner before plonking on the lounge. Eunbyul holds onto his hand and promptly falls asleep. Jisung smiles lightly at her before he sighs.

"Try not to wake her up," Jisung murmurs. "I didn't think she'd fall asleep so easily,"

Recounting the events of today, including Youngho's visit in the field makes anger flare up in him again and Jisung can see how Minho struggles to keep his own fury down.

But it's not worth it to let anger overwhelm them now. Soon they'll be storming in, hearts heavy and the memories they cherish so much will fuel them on, to win. To fix what corruption has plagued the world.

Minho reaches for out for Jisung, pulls him tight to his body. There's no need for words, there's nothing else they can say that they haven't.

And all this planning, all the struggles of getting to this point. Fighting for survival and hoping for a future that their children can grow up in without a threat looming over the world. It comes down to this point now. Getting ready to finally do what Jisung's planned from the start.

It's time.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone!! Updates on Sunday are back now!!

As always here is the birthday update lol I'm 18 today!! Happy birthday to me ☐☐

54. 53→

The first time Jisung stepped onto a ship, he had been burning with passion. Power, desperation that clouded this judgement.

Now, with his daughter softly tugging on the ends of his hair while she's tucked to his side as he stands on the same ship that had flown them across the settlements, that had crashed into sand dunes, that they sent days digging out. And this time they are finally going to fly in the direction of that greyscale city that has destroyed so many lives.

Jisung doesn't regret his choice. He doesn't wish he could go back and never tell Fern and Isa. He might be scared out of his life, now that he truly has something to fight for and he couldn't put his life so lightly. Eunbyul needs him. Minho needs him. He has something worth living for, something that he loves more than anything on this planet. A family worth fighting for.

They've gone over this plan long enough for it to be printed into everyone's minds. Everyone knows where they must go, what they're meant to do. It doesn't make it any less daunting, though.

Fern steps up to the ship and smiles softly at the boy she thinks of as a son. Eunbyul softly coos against his shoulder, slowly falling asleep as he sways softly, gently coaxing her to sleep. He wouldn't dare to bring her any close to The Capital. Fern volunteered to stay back with the residents that aren't to fight like the farmers that have fulfilled their part already and the mothers with their children.

Isa comes to stand next to her, armoured with the lightweight fabric

that the scientists at Rahka had developed before they even knew of a war. Jisung wears the same material as well as all the others that are going to The Capital. It was expensive to manufacture in bulk but the leaders of both Rahka and other settlements had agreed this is the best bet for ensuring the forces are safer than storming in without protection.

Eunbyul goes to Fern with a small fuss, her hands fisted in Jisung's shirt, clinging to him. He bids her a soft goodbye and watches as she slowly accepts that he's not going to reach out to hold her. She loves Fern, anyways and quickly settles on snuggling against her and promptly shutting her eyes.

It's not easy knowing that the people leaving may never return with colour in their faces, warm skin and beating pulses, but it cannot go on. Thousands, perhaps millions dying because of power greedy bastards that formulated a intricate plan that fooled everyone for too long.

For a better world, Jisung continuously reminds himself whenever that sinking feeling appears in his gut. He stares at his daughters face, his eyes remembering the soft picker of her lips as she sleeps, chubby cheeks squished against her grandmothers shoulder.

Minho appears by his side, his hand slipping around the curve of his waist, tugging him closer to his body to offer him some comfort.

Minho steps forward to stroke Eunbyul's cheek. The baby doesn't stir but a soft smile appears across her mouth. Jisung bites down on his lip, the pain distracting him from the thought of never seeing her again.

His hand clutches at his abdomen where he had grown her, nestled safely inside his body even though he had struggled.

Minho presses a kiss to his forehead, brushing strands of hair out of his eyes, his hand giving him comforting a squeeze to ground him out of his gaze.

“I remember when you first came to us,” Fern speaks softly, rocking softly to keep Eunbyul asleep with all the hustle around them.

Jisung stretches out his spine, standing taller with his shoulders squared. He’s determined now, that raw strength setting into him. That same strength that had been the only thing that kept him going in the last stretch of his pregnancy. That burning fire that Minho has witnessed since he first busted through that heavy white door to see a younger Jisung, a frail boy with a fiery gaze. He hadn’t known much about the world other than betrayal and hurt back then. Now, he’s experienced much more than what his hurtful past gave him. Trust, comfort and the many forms of love.

His first love was for Felix, the first person grew to trust, a friendship that has grown stronger through each hardship. Felix helped him understand that the world wasn’t just full of hurt and people taking advantage of others. Felix, the always positive ray of sunshine had shown him things Jisung wouldn’t have fathomed without his warm smile and that tinkling laugh of his. He grew to love everyone that traveled with him, who helped each other through the long and strenuous journey.

And then he had felt the love of a parent. When he first realised of

her presence, growing beneath his skin in that cold cave he had been full of terror. He hadn't felt love then, but trepidation for what he was about to endure and fear that he would never love his baby because of his past and the way she came to him. But from the moment his abdomen formed the slightest bump, the conformation that it was real and this was his baby, he had felt love for her. And it had grown along with her growth within him. He could do anything for her. To keep her safe, to keep her warm, fed and nestled against his body, he would do anything. And for her he will come back.

But his love for Minho had been the slowest of all. Whereas he trusted Felix, Jisung was wary of Minho and that powerful gaze of his. He hadn't feared him, but he had made a clear barrier between them and had been strict in keeping it up until the rest of the group had enough of his confusing ways and distrustful nature. Minho was strict in his ways, not stopping to console Jisung out of his fury. Minho knew he didn't understand and getting angry at him would only make matters worse. Minho knew how to make Jisung calm down in his presence, without being overbearing and physically affectionate like Felix preferred. Minho had always been there, waiting for Jisung to come to him and not forcing him to interact with him.

Jisung hadn't realised what he felt for Minho was romantic love for a long time. He supposes he's loved him for a long time, as well.

"You were still recovering from your journey," Fern smiles fondly at him. "Still recovering from Eunbyul's birth, but you were so brave to speak up... to tell us everything that happened,"

"And look where you are now," Isa muses in that chirpy tone of hers. She's slung an arm around her wife's shoulders, leaning against her taller body.

Jisung looks down at his shoes and smiles softly, feeling a little overwhelmed with everything.

“I had to say something... I was suffocating beneath it all... and to save everyone...” Minho squeezes his hand reassuringly.

“You are a brave one, Jisung,” Fern tells him. “We will wait for you to come back to us,”

“Until then,” Jisung smiles at her softly. “Until then, Mother,”

Fern gives him one last teary-eyed smile before she leaves the ship with his daughter safely tucked in her arms.

—

“The slums will be unguarded for the most part, an entry point if you will,” Isa’s voice echos throughout the ship, bouncing off the metal walls and through the speaker systems in other ships.

“It will be our landing zone as well as the first part of The Capital we’ll clear out. The citizens will be loaded into the ships and brought back straight away. Injured and sick will be looked after in the medical ship.” Hyunjin is on board the medical ship, busy setting up beds at the last minute in preparation for patients.

“We’ve gone over the plan many times, and though we cannot be sure this will go to plan it’s important to remember our goal; save the people of the tyrannical government!”

Cheers erupt in the ship and Jisung can’t help but sigh as he looks out the window at the passing world below them. Minho is quiet beside him, deep in thought about something probably to do with them about to risk their lives.

Changbin taps Jisung on the shoulder and gives him a weak smile. “How’re you feeling?”

“Feelings be damned,” Jisung grumbles out. “It was easier when I didn’t have so much to live for,”

“I guess that’s the irony of life.” Changbin shrugs. “Once you have something to protect, something to love, life seems all the more fragile and unforgiving,”

“Tell me about it,” Minho grunts as he wraps a strong arm around Jisung’s shoulders. “Are you and your crew ready?” Minho asks his friend who nods slowly. “As ready as you can be going into a revolution,”

“Fair point,” Minho muses gently.

“I trust us, though,” Changbin then says, his chest puffing out in confidence. Whether it be mock confidence or not, Jisung has to say

it makes him feel a little better. “I trust you,”

“Sometimes I think what would’ve happened if I hadn’t indulged you in history and just what a revolution was,” Chan’s voice is teasing, but the underlying tone of worry doesn’t skip past Jisung or any of his other friends. “Well, I’d say we wouldn’t be on our way back to the place we all grew up, ready to blow it to bits?” Minho offers and Chan rolls his eyes.

“Hey, the plan isn’t to blow the place up,” Chan scolds him and Minho snorts at him. “What a shame,”

—

The ride over to The Capital feels too short.

In comparison to the long treacherous journey that took them a full eight months, the two day-long journey feels almost infuriating. When they recall that darn journey across continents, the soles of their feet throb, kicking the pain they could never rid themselves of for eight months.

Jisung knows however, that if a ship had been spotted during that journey, they wouldn’t have made the risk to approach. It was dangerous enough that The Capital had been tailing them and it could have easily been a ploy. But Jisung still remembers the feelings throughout the journey and he wishes he would’ve been nicer to himself and taken better care of himself and Eunbyul.

Minho readjusts the bulletproof fabric that lies beneath Jisung's shirt, fiddling with the hems and making sure its laying flat against him.

"You're like a worried mother," Jisung teases him softly and Minho scowls softly at him but leans in and kisses his lips swiftly. "I've got two babies,"

"Oh shut up," Jisung rolls his eyes at him.

"We'll come back," Minho then mutters softly, pressing their foreheads together gently. "And hold our baby,"

"Of course," Jisung mutters back. "And then we'll be able to settle down finally and not have to worry about The Capital ever again." a soft smile appears across both of their mouths.

"That's a promise," Minho tells him and that's all Jisung needed to hear.

—

Valkyrie's jaw is set when Jisung finds her standing around the tactical table in the central hub of the ship. Dawn is barely cracking, and thus they rely on the artificial lights that are wired overhead to see the intricate map.

“You’ve rode into battles before,” Jisung states and a sigh leaves her lips, her brows furrowing together with the slightest bit of apprehension. “Battle between men arguing over the safe passages in the mountains before the long winters hit,” Valkyrie says, obviously dissatisfied with the differences in the two battles. “Not in this scale,” She hasn’t looked at him once, her icy eyes narrowed and a frown marring her face. Her scar is crinkled at the edges due to her grimace.

It surprises Jisung himself when he sees right past her. Valkyrie is not an easy person to read. Ever since they first met her, she had been full of surprises but now Jisung sees her bare. If anyone else looked over at her, they’d mistake this look for anger, distaste and annoyance but all Jisung sees is a scared woman. More specifically, a woman afraid for a certain person.

“Hyunjin will be okay,” Jisung tells her quietly and she turns to him finally, her lips pursed and that ring shining against her red mouth.

Her teeth tug on her bottom lip before she sighs and then her faces softens, finally letting her brows smooth out. “Perhaps I should’ve practiced to be a healer in my village, too? Then I could have a quiet mind that I’d be there to protect him,” her voice is quiet, a low whisper as if shes praying to those divinities the people of Scalva worship.

But Valkyrie was not born to be a healer like her husband. She was well trained in the arts due to watching her husband and learning off him— the best shes ever known— but Valkyrie is a warrior. A woman made in the forgery of bravery.

Jisung wraps an arm around her shoulders and they instantly lean

against each other. Bravery can only go so far when the ones you loved are threatened. Jisung understands this.

“I was respected in Scalva.” She starts off. “First because my father was the leader of the clans and second because I trained hard and became the youngest female warrior of all the clans... but I’ve never felt so comfortable and complete in my life after Hyunjin appeared in the snow. My heart is half of my own now,”

“I understand,” Jisung tells her softly. He feels similarly about his little family.

Her head is a welcome weight against his shoulder. Standing at similar heights, they hold each other comfortably and offer that bit of comfort that they both need. To know that she’s not the only one worried about the man that she holds so dearly in her heart, no matter how brave she might be.

Minho had gone just as the clock hit four thirty to collapse The Capital’s electrical signals to begin their plan.

The signals will go down just before dawn breaks, giving them time to penetrate the slums and gain access to the rest of the city.

“And I know see why you called this city lifeless,” Valkyrie mutters suddenly and Jisung grits his teeth at the looming city ahead in the far distance.

Unlike the earthy tones of Mydar, the shining jewels of The City of Sivra, The Capital is void of life in its architecture.

Grey concrete walls, grey tiles and steel the colour of angry storm clouds. There is no trees within the vicinity of the city that's main towers brush the undersides of dark clouds.

"I have never seen anything like it," she whispers but her lips curl upwards in distaste, the awe that held in her tone when she first began travelling with them is no where to be found. It seems it's been traded out for disgust for the city below them.

"Yeah," Jisung breathes out beside her. "I almost forgot what it looked like,"

He had only seen glimpses of it as they were fleeing, and he had only memories of the slums and that square where his father had handed him over for money that hadn't even helped their family.

"Hey baby, the signals are down," Minho's voice fills his ears just as the lights that they could see suddenly flicker off. Jisung wiggles out of Valkyrie's hold when he hears his lovers voice.

Jisung frowns and presses his fingers against his earpiece. "When you call me baby it feels almost like you're mocking me?" Jisung shoots back at him and Minho's cackling laughter comes through the small device.

“Are you not going to praise me? Without me we’d be going in and getting electrocuted,”

“Is that all you want?” Jisung drawls out. “Oh fabulous job, Minho. You are our saving grace” he says monotonously. Minho sighs back.

“Take your ear piece out now,” Minho tells him through the coms. “We’re close.”

Jisung takes a deep breath and just as his fingers grasp at the small device, Minho’s voice fills his ear again.

“I love you,”

Jisung freezes before a smile blooms across his face.

His fingers press against the button to send his voice through to Minho. “I love you,”

Valkyrie sends a soft smile in his direction and then rolls her shoulders and neck, stretching out her muscles.

“Well, lets show them what we are made of,”

Jisung looks around the ship, looking for a certain blonde person and

when he spots him, he gives him a soft smile.

Felix gives him a nod and Jisung breathes out deeply.

Isa arrives in the central room, guns slung on both of her hips and her eyes stormy, unlike the usual chipper woman she is. She looks cold, cunning and like that, Jisung understands why she has kept her position and why she is so respected in the guard division. Gone is the sunny woman with contagious laughter, now replaced with a woman of stone and power.

“We mustn’t get distracted. If there are any unexpected outcomes and changes within the plan, you must act on those orders with haste. The special units will be on high alert, if they order you, you must listen,” her voice booms off the steel walls and past speaker in the other ships trailing after them closely.

A chorus of ‘understood’s fill the ship. Jisung locks eyes with Isa and just like that, the doors to the ship open and Jisung is suddenly facing the very place that tortured him throughout his youth.

The smell of the slums travel with the soft breeze into the ship. The smell of human filth is strong. The moment the air hits Jisung’s face he purses his lips and reaches out to grab Felix’s hand who’s standing just behind him. Felix responds by squeezing his hand.

The outskirts of the slums are a mere fifty meters from the landing position of their ship. Odin and a few of his men rush out, swinging sharp electric saws to cut through the unconnected electric fence that contains the slums. Jisung had crawled through holes in this very

fence when he was young. He had been zapped a few times which had resulted in his skin burning from the electric shock. It had been enough to stop him from going out into the wild for a while.

Minho exits the control room to see Jisung and Felix clinging onto each other. He watches them briefly before Chan softly elbows him in the ribs. "Is your gun charged?" He questions quietly, not exactly sure what to say to possibly ease their anxieties in this situation.

Chan is used to normally knowing how to diffuse a situation. He had done it many times through their journey, but now he feels helpless to all the worry.

"I have seen that fire," Minho speaks and Chan locks eyes with his longtime best friend. "Ever since I broke into his room," Chan doesn't have to ask what Minho is talking about. He had seen it too, early on in the forest he had realised Jisung was no regular boy, but a boy with a heart forged in the deepest fires of hell. It was awakening slowly, from a flash of heat, to a spark, to kindling lighting on fire, red veins creeping through dry undergrowth, to a burning ember until his fires finally light. From a small fire to a fire big enough to warm a hearth, to a roaring furnace and then— an inferno that no one can put out.

Jisung burns, Minho tells him. Jisung burns so brightly, so powerful and strong. He has waited for this, he says, proud. Waited for the very moment his flames will erupt.

And Minho watches, eyes locked on his love as his feet take him out of the ship, his boots hitting the metal ground of the ships ramp echoing in his mind as he steps closer.

Jisung slips through the opening in the fence and like that, Minho swears he sees that white-hot fire erupt, like a dormant volcano suddenly roaring to life.

Chan watches as his friends eyes shine and a proud smile stretches across his lips.

This is it, he realises. There is no going back now.

—

Seungmin weaves throughout the mess of people hurrying into the slums, hurrying to begin helping as many people as possible onto the many ships that are now empty and awaiting passengers.

Down deep, he itches to run to his old home where he last saw his mother. To see if she survived the massacre of the human made disease. But he is needed elsewhere, to ensure they can save as many of the unfortunate souls that are left in the barren slums.

So he stands up straighter with Jeongin by his side and together they begin the search for survivors.

Seungmin had never been in the slums before this moment, Jeongin had been briefly but they are both as unfamiliar with this place of

The Capital as each other.

It is not laid out like the streets in the walled city. Instead, huts are sprawled out wherever a free space lies and all that remains between them are tight passageways that are muddy and littered with ruins.

The first person they see is an elderly man, coming out of his home to see what the sudden noise was all about. After all, the slums had been secluded by the government long ago.

Fear plasters itself over his aged face until Seungmin gives him a soft smile. "We are not here to hurt you, Sir," he calls out gently and Jeongin nods in confirmation beside him. "We're here to save you all,"

"All of us?" The old man croaks out. His hair is stark white and he is malnourished by the way his stomach is concave and by how gaunt his face is. "Yes," Jeongin replies. "All of you,"

"Oh, my dear boys," he cries out, pulling his bare feet through the mud towards them. It is still dark, but the relief in his eyes is clearly seen. "But the two of you cannot possibly get us all out!"

"No," Seungmin agrees with him. "That's why it's quite convenient that theres a lot more of us,"

The man looks around momentarily and he spots several others rounding the corner of a hut.

“How... how many...?”

Jeongin holds up his hands and counts his fingers and Seungmin scoffs at him. “Around a few hundred thousand,” Seungmin replies, slapping Jeongin’s hands down as he talks.

The man seems shocked. “But... where did so many people come from?”

“I’m really sorry,” Seungmin looks behind him just as a few other volunteers run by with several injured people carried on stretchers. “But we have to hurry to try to get as many of you out until they notice. Please, it will be all explained afterwards, please follow us, quickly,” Seungmin urges him to follow and he complies without another word, hobbling after them.

“You see the ships? Yes?” The man nods quickly as soon as they arrive within eye distance of the metal beasts. “Go towards them and you’ll be directed to the medical team,”

The old man gives them his thanks again before running off.

There are more survivors than they initially thought after hearing of the inhumane treatment of the people of the slums. When the sun finally peaks and light begins to give them away, it becomes apparent they no longer have enough time to safely get everyone out.

At least, most of the people now understand that they’re being saved

and all get the gist of where to escape to which is helpful— Seungmin knows something has to change.

“Reporting to 522,” he calls through the coms. “522, answering the call,” a voice answers quickly. “Requesting backup, immediately. Bring ships overhead the slums and lower the ladders, we don’t have enough time,”

“But they may see us,” the person on the other line answers back, forgetting the proper coms speech and that they were to listen to him since he was in the specials unit. A bell suddenly rings out, akin to the one that rung routinely everyday to signal the end of school for the children lucky enough to have an education. But Seungmin knows it is not a mere school bell ringing in the distance. The cover of darkness has lifted and with that, the fleets presence has been detected.

“They already know,” Seungmin shouts into the mic. “Get over here and help as many up onboard as you can,”

“Affirmative,” he finally receives and not a minute later are three aircrafts hovering above the slums, stretched out and allowing quicker escapes.

People at all ends of the slums are rushing towards the floating ships, frantic to get to safety after they’ve processed this is an escape, not another one of The Capitals cruel tricks.

Seungmin watches in mild horror as several people climb the ladders, some with small bundles of what they could gather in time, others with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

He notices that no one carries children up with them. No children had been born in the slums for years, he knew this but seeing not a single child Jaein's age or a little older elicits fear in him. There had been children. Jaein spoke of other children around her age but with a sinking realisation, Seungmin doesn't recall Jisung's younger sister saying explicitly that the children she knew were from The Capital.

Perhaps Jaein had been the last to be born— or worse the only one to survive infancy and early childhood. Or they took the children and moulded them into the people the government wished to have full control over.

“Approximately five minutes until contact,” Minho's voice comes over the coms. “Received,” Seungmin replies quickly. Jeongin is frowning beside him, helping a weak looking man a little older than them to his feet after falling.

“How long until the connection is back up?” He asks quickly, needing to know how much time they have to get the rest of their plan into motion.

“With all signals gone, at least half a day, there's nothing left,” Minho replies. He's somewhere deep in the slums helping others out as well as answering as many calls as he can.

“All armed units, protect the entrances, prepare for contact with their soldiers,” Seungmin recognises the voice as Isa's just as he goes to help Jeongin haul the man over both their soldiers and race towards the closest ship.

“I’m going to have to help him up,” Jeongin says, hauling most of the barely conscious man’s weight against his shoulder. Seungmin pats him on the back, not doubting his friend after all his training with Chan and his efforts to gain strength. Jeongin has flourished from a small boy, suffering just as much as their other friends during the journey to a young man with a healthy complexion and muscle coating his body.

“Good luck,” Seungmin breathes out and with that, Jeongin watches his friend sprint off into the mess of the slums, searching for more people to help.

Jeongin hooks his legs onto the metal ladder and with his free hand—his arm is tucked around a gap between steps in the ladder—presses against his ear, pressing twice to be directed to the medical team’s coms. “Medical, you’ve gotta pull the ladder on 352, unconscious man needs medical attention,”

“Affirmative,” Comes someone’s reply, one of the female nurses that hails from Mydar. Jeongin is mildly familiar with her voice as one of the nurses that took care of Eunbyul while she was newly born.

The heavy duty ladder attached to the entrance of the ship lifts them higher in the air. Jeongin’s arm is only a little sore, the man is malnourished and severely underweight so he’s not too hard to carry, but the pressure of having to hold onto him while dangling on a ladder is a little daunting. Jeongin tries to not ponder on that for too long.

The ship he’s currently getting lifted into isn’t the medical team’s

ship, but out of the corner of his eye, Jeongin sees the ship Hyunjin is in charge of manning heading towards his location.

By the time he's up on deck with the man, the ship is hovering right in front of him, it's ramp like door opening and creating a path to swap the man over to the medical station.

And like that, Jeongin finds himself back on that ladder, this time, riding it as it extends towards the ground to the small group of people waiting to climb up.

Seungmin huffs out as he rounds a corner that leads out of the dense slums to where working class people live outside of the wall. Seungmin had once lived in this area, with his adoring mother.

It has been in his mind all this time. Since he was locked inside the institution he had wondered if she had survived or if she had to face the repercussions of his choice to breakout. As much as he wants to look for her, to find answers and gain peace that he has not had the pleasure of having, he knows its best to not let his feelings take control in this situation. There are many people in need here and when Seungmin spots an armed unit blocking off the end of the street and a blur of white in the distance, his heart speeds up and his feet take him to the square of the outside city where many people typically gather.

When he arrives, there are people everywhere. All of them are rather frantic but Seungmin cannot blame them. There are a few guards lined up here, ready for the white soldiers to come and no doubt open fire on them.

“Everyone, this way!” Seungmin yells. “I’ll take you to the ships, you must get away. Quickly!”

They hurry after Seungmin and just as he rounds the first corner out of the square, he sees those white soldiers pushing their way through their defences. Seungmin gulps and signals for the people behind him to stop behind the wall.

His teeth tug on his bottom lip as he raises a hand to his earpiece. “Backup requested at the north east side of the outside city. A unit of white soldiers have arrived and there are—“ he turns to look behind him at all the people staring at him and with a flip of his stomach he realises they’re relying on him to get out of her safely. He gulps.

“There are around forty citizens escaping to the ships,”

“On it,” A clear and steady voice sounds through his ear and Seungmin feels relieved at the voice who answered.

“Everyone,” he turns to the people all huddled together, scared for their lives no doubt. “We’re going to make it to those ships, alright?” He gets nods from the men— Seungmin also realises there is not a single woman here. Seeing the after affects of the government meddling makes his blood boil. These men have lost mothers, sisters, wives, daughters all at the hands of those people that are probably gathering in those towers that touch the clouds.

“We have to be careful and I need you to listen to me so we can all

get out,”

“Thank you,” An older man replies. “Thank you so much,” Seungmin smiles gently at him and nods his head.

It's only when he sees Chan a few minutes later with Minho hot on his tail as well as a well trained unit of soldiers that does Seungmin move the group.

He and Chan lock eyes for a split second and Seungmin has the group moving throughout the streets, weaving them through the shortcuts before he can hear the beginnings of battle.

His heart feels as if it's beating in his throat, but he pushes through.

For the people.

—

Chan does not have good memories of the white soldiers. He had watched them murder the people he thought of as family, had seen Changbin's father taken away by the hands of those people. They have caused destruction to everyone around him and to all these people running for their lives. Chan would say he's a patient person, someone who truly tries to see the good in people, give them a

chance and to understand them. But for these people that have done nothing but followed evil orders— Chan will not waste his time on these people.

When Seungmin calls in, his voice calm but Chan knows Seungmin. He sees the boys face in his mind as he hears his voice. He's frantic, panicked. Chan doesn't waste a second to move. Not just because he is close to Seungmin's location and that he wants to help his friend but because he feels as if he has a personal vendetta against these white soldiers. Minho joins, being close as well as being adept in fighting.

As soon as he and Minho arrive on the scene, the leader of the white soldiers unit seems to recognise them by the tilt of their head. Underneath that full face helmet Chan is sure there is a smug look.

"Bang Chan and Lee Minho," Their voice is distorted by the helmet but Chan can hear them clearly. "You are wanted criminals of The Capital," So they had taken note of other missing peoples inside The Capital after all.

"Seems useless to me," Minho spits out, his gaze venomous. "Or rather such a shame that we've been on that list for so long and to come here like this, isn't it? Not very satisfying I'd imagine,"

There he is, Chan thinks fondly as his friend stops speaking. That man that is fierce when needed, who protected and taunted when he felt they were in danger.

"You doubt the power of The Capital," they spit back and Minho

scoffs and gives them that feline like smile— the one where his eyes burn holes into whatever happens to be in his eyesight. If looks could kill, Minho would be unstoppable.

“We’ll see about that,”

Minho makes the first move, gripping both of the guns from his hips and pointing them at the soldiers. He doesn’t wait for their reactions and pulls the trigger, aiming right at the leader of the unit. The laser-like charge from the gun shocks the soldier and they crumple to the ground below.

“Huh, that works pretty well, I’d say,” Minho says and Chan rolls his eyes just before they open fire on them. Both had been expecting quicker reflexes from the leader.

Unlike the weapons the guards and soldiers of The Capital use, the guns and weapons they handle are not designed to kill. Instead of shooting bullets through skulls and chests like their enemy, the shock guns work perfectly well. All of the soldiers would be thrown into prison later and let out if they were deemed able to move away from their old ways. After all there would be no where for them to go after they’re done here.

The few bullets that do hit only bounce off their chests, protected by the Rahkains invention of lightweight bulletproof material. Instead of leaving gaping wounds, the hit of the bullets against him feel like it’ll bruise but he can withstand it.

When another group of people—smaller than the one Seungmin had

just led away— are suddenly caught between the fighting, Chan and Minho make it their priority to cover them as they make their escape.

He hears footfall behind them as they herd the group in the right direction. Minho turns and shoots and Chan hears the telltale hit of an unconscious body hit the ground behind them. They take turns like that, caging the people with their bodies and trying to get rid of them off their trail.

One white soldier is a good shot. A woman— Chan almost cannot believe his eyes at the sight of her— screams as she falls, her hands clutching onto her leg. She is an older woman and thin like everyone else inside of the slums that have been locked off from the inside city of The Capital. Minho ducks to cover her, helping her back to her feet as Chan shields the others and shoots at the unit gaining on them.

Their armed unit are picking some of them off, but the white soldiers are the elites of this society. Several men in the armed units are needed to take down one properly trained soldier. It is clear to both Chan and Minho that not all of these white soldiers have gone through the vigorous training methods of these elite soldiers.

Some of them hesitate, seem to cower in fear at the sight of their comrades falling to the ground, not knowing that they're not quite dead. And Chan knows with a sinking feeling in his gut, he knows that is where the healthy youth of the slums have disappeared to.

The woman has been shot in the leg, through her upper thigh and Minho knows with what little medical training he has got from hanging around Hyunjin is that there is an artery in the thigh and this woman is bleeding a lot.

Without hesitating, Minhó rips off some of his shirt, the layer above his bullet proof armour and hurries to tie it around her thigh, hoping he can get her to the medical ship before she bleeds out.

“Call in!” Minhó shouts at his friend who takes down another two soldiers as Minhó administers sloppy first aid.

“Medical team, needed over head at the north eastern gateway. A woman shot in the thigh, severe bleeding,”

“Received,” Comes a quick reply. “We will dock in the square near the gateway, make haste.”

“To the square!” Chan gestures with his hand for everyone to follow him. Minhó carries the woman in his arms and his mind flashes back to when he had carried Jisung like this, bleeding heavily and crying for his baby. He shakes the memory away and rushes along with the group, not daring to look back now he’s not currently armed.

“We’ve got the medical team coming, okay? You’ll be in good hands there,” Minhó tries to comfort the woman, but she seems to be in too much pain to even register his words.

The square is only a block away and the ship is lowering to allow quick access by the time they’ve made it.

Seungmin is boarded on the ship to Chan's surprise. "I thought you were getting the other group out?"

"I did," Seungmin takes a deep breath. "I had to call in for a seizure at the last block to the nearest loading ship," Seungmin explains just as Minho runs by and puts the woman straight onto a free bed.

Kaya appears and begins to assess her. "Gunshot wound to the thigh, excessive bleeding within a short time," Minho then notices that his lower half of his dark shirt, for the lack of better word, drenched in blood.

Seungmin frowns at the new arrival. "A woman?"

"So it seems," Chan shrugs. "Well, I've got to get these guys to that ship," he says before leading the others away and down those sloping streets.

Seungmin spares a glance behind him where Minho is beside the injured woman and Kaya, a friend he and Felix had made early on in Mydar.

"Minho," he calls out gently. The man turns and Seungmin purses his lips. "Have you seen Jisung or Felix yet?"

Minho gulps nervously and shakes his head. Seungmin breathes out and looks at his shoes. "I better get going," he whispers then and Minho hums. "Me too, I haven't gone to the farming district yet..."

Seungmin gives him a soft smile. "I'll come, too. Maybe you'll see your father?"

"If they didn't kill him, too," Minho grits out. Seungmin gives him a swift hug and pats his back. "Come on, lets go,"

Just as Minho takes a step away, leaving the ship a gasp comes from the beds followed by a desperate sounding sob. "Seungmin... is that you?"

Seungmin freezes.

That voice.

He's never forgotten that voice.

"Mother?" He croaks out, his eyes darting to the woman being treated by Kaya.

"Oh my boy," she croaks out. "I'm so sorry,"

"Mother," he rushes to her side, grasping onto her hand as he struggles to breathe in. "Mother you're alive..." he whispers, partly in awe that she had overcome not just the disease but the heartless government after his risky actions.

Although Seungmin had promised himself to not be greedy, to not look for his mother within the rubble he has never been at peace with himself until this moment. For the sake of his mother, and for his heart that has been through too much, Seungmin grips onto her hand. "Mother, I missed you,"

A moment, he decides. He has a moment for her after this long.

Minho smiles softly at the scene and leaves swiftly, heading towards the place where he grew up with his hands in the dirt and sorting out the seed banks.

The farming areas are not far from the north east side of the town but on the way he runs into several soldiers that all meet the same fate against his shock guns. The few people still escaping from this side of the town are guided to where they should go and to move carefully.

Minho is afraid.

He's afraid of walking up those cobble roads and seeing barren land, dry soil and no signs of life where he spent his childhood. He's terrified of not seeing his father again and giving him the piece of mind he deserves.

His father, after all, had played a part in their original plan of getting the four boys out. He had supported their notion and had allowed them to do what they believed to be right. Minho has a lot to thank his father for.

For raising him with such tenderness. His father had taught him how to sow seeds. He remembers being fascinated at the first seeds he had germinated. Those little sprouts had no idea what awaited them above the warm soil, whether they would be pecked out by a hungry bird, fry in the hot sun in the summers or if they'd be trampled. They did not know their fate, but they had sprung up from the ground, strong and unwilling to do anything but grow taller, stronger.

In a way, Minho thinks that those seeds sound oddly familiar.

And if Minho's father was still alive, still nursing plants with soil stained hands, Minho will thank him for allowing him to storm into the institution. He will thank him for allowing him to have the chance to meet Jisung. Thank him because Jisung is everything that feels right inside his heart. Jisung has his fingers wrapped around his heart, perched on a golden platter. And their tiny daughter he fights so hard for. For their little girl who's cries at first pierced his ears. And perhaps, he hopes, for those little ones to come after this battle.

Minho's heart stutters in his chest when he finds the fields empty.

There is no sign of ploughed land, no sign of those rich fields that Minho used to spend his days in.

He can't linger on it for too long, however. Several white soldiers storm around the shed where his father kept the many instruments of his craft. They haven't noticed Minho, but are heading closer to his childhood home.

He shoots two down as soon as his brain registers that there's still hope for his father—empty hope, but Jisung has taught him many things.

He will never forget the reasoning behind Eunbyul's name and why it was so significant. He renders another unconscious as he begins to run to his childhood home, and another as he reaches the gate.

By the time he's inside the property, five soldiers remain, guns readied.

They seem to be ignoring him, they had to know he was there after hearing three of their comrades fall. Minho takes this as an opportunity to strike, to disarm them and hope it's enough to buy some more time just in case his father is still alive.

Five to one, the odds aren't in his favour but it doesn't mean he won't try.

"What are you doing here?" He spits at them, blocking a hit with the butt of one of his guns. There's no answer, but a sudden crash and clang puts them onto high alert.

And then Minho sees him.

His father appears with a sharpened pitchfork, looking well to Minho's relief. "Leave my son alone!" He shouts and charges with his pitchfork.

“Dad!” Minhø shouts and immediately raises his guns at the five soldiers, leaping in front of his father who doesn’t wear the bulletproof material.

They’re all standing out the front of the entry way to the farm. And its when Minhø hears a scream that he realises they were never after the farmer behind him.

The scream echoes in his ears, familiar and his blood pounds at it.

“Jisung!” He yells out as he sees him running towards him from a thin alleyway across the wide street.

The five soldiers leap and surround him and Minhø watches in horror as he takes a boot to the chest, knocking him down onto his knees and then— Jisung grunts as his face is pushed against the muddled road.

Their eyes lock and Minhø roars out, raising his gun but Jisung’s eyes are blazing. Fire burns within him, burning bright in those dark irises of his. A small gasp escapes his lovers lips as a soldier stabs a needle into his neck and Minhø watches, frozen in horror as Jisung goes limp.

“Jisung...” he whispers out, his feet are itching to run for him. To burn down everyone in his path to his love. But Minhø stays put in front of his father, protecting him with his body.

And Minho watches with his pulse beating rapidly as he watches the owner of his heart pulled away.

Notes for the Chapter:

PAIN HAHA

And so the long awaited fight begins....

Thank you all for the birthday wishes I had a wonderful day!!

I hope u guys don't hate me too much after this hah..

Notes for the Chapter:

Tw for character death (minor character)

Minho wishes he could blow this darn city to steaming rubble. He wishes he could have his way with this place that made too many people suffer.

Minho feels as if he's stuck in time. The world passes him by after he watches Jisung disappear. He doesn't know how long he isn't present but he come back to the moment when a warm hand touches his arm. He flinches and unconsciously shifts out of the touch.

His eyes dart around, looking for danger and only when he sees no white soldiers around does he allow himself to take a deep breath and finally face his father.

The man before him looks as if he has aged years since he last saw him. His hair, once thick and black like his own is thinner, greying and dirty. His cheeks are hollow, as if he has not had his fill in months. But his eyes are warm, still holding that certain brightness that Minho recalls having seen throughout his childhood. His father grabs him by the shoulders and pulls him to his chest.

Minho stands there, stunned and still in his fathers hold until when his father finally speaks to him. "My boy," he cries out. "Oh, my son... you're alive... you're alive!"

It then hits Minho like a ton that his father had been suffering the

same type of uncertainty for his survival just like Minho has this whole time.

“Yes,” he croaks out. “I’m alive,” his father is in tears. His hands cup his sons face, pressing his forehead against Minho’s to feel his son. The heat of his skin and the telltale rhythm of his heart.

“Dad,” Minho mutters out, cupping his fathers sun-worn hand and taking it between his two hands after removing it from his face. “We have to go. You have to get out of here,” his fathers eyes are shaky as if he’s trying to hold in the fresh onset of tears welling in his eyes. His father looks behind them, gazing at the farmhouse where he was born and raised. They have many fond memories of this place, but the bad ones lingering around are like bitter poison. This place is not once it used to be.

His father nods once in understanding. “Where will we go?” He asks in a small voice. Minho gives him what he hopes is a reassuring smile, but he doesn’t think he’s quite capable of that after watching Jisung being manhandled like that.

“To a place I call home,” he replies.

His father accepts that and clutches onto his pitchfork and straightens his spine. “Then I suppose I will call that place home, too,”

As soon as Minho has watched his father board a ship, a panicked voice fills his coms.

“Captain! We’ve detected another signal! It’s unlike the other power signals and it’s a strongly protected one,”

Minho frowns and presses his fingers to his ear. “Do you think you can close it down by yourselves? I don’t know if theres enough time for me to come help out,”

“Negative, Captain,” one of his fellow coders speak. “I don’t believe we’ll be able to get into in time,”

“How long?” Minho questions him. Theres a small pause hesitation on the other side. “I fear it could take a whole day,”

Minho grits his teeth. “We don’t have that much time,” he answers back. “Find out what it is for in the meantime, then worry about its importance,”

“Will do,” comes the curt reply.

Minho clenches his jaw and takes a deep breath. The plan, he reminds himself. It had almost skipped his mind after the new information.

“Phase two, initiated,” he says through the ear piece that each head

of unit is equipped with. He cracks his knuckles and raises a brow at Jeongin who comes to stand with him. "Did you see it?" He asks quietly and Minho bites down onto his bottom lip. Jeongin pats his back and sighs. "Right... well I guess it's time to scale that bloody wall for the second time,"

"I guess so," Minho mutters.

Where the slums have been a struggle to clear out, the real danger is only beginning. The moment they cross that wall, anything can happen and their plan could very well crumble right before them.

Minho grits his teeth and stomps forwards on towards that wall.

—

Changbin feels nostalgic as he's creeping through the alleyways and through the few abandoned buildings. The people following close behind, others that shared the same talent with him in many different parts of the world.

Last time he had been guiding his friends through this place, going where he had memorised a clear path. The Capital has changed since last time, however and the path they took last time, winding through blind spots in security cameras is now stationed with new equipment, but it lacks people.

And since Minho happened to take down all the signals The Capital used for most of their electricity, it's honestly easier this time. Save the few units of soldiers they have to hide from every now and then.

He listens carefully to what others are saying in the coms and when Minho's voice comes through, stating that phase two of their plan has begun, Changbin gestures for his crew to follow close behind him, sneaking around the walled city in broad daylight. They had the cover of darkness at the start which had given them a good head start and now in the final stretch of their destination, Changbin feels like the boy he had been not even two years ago. He remembers the first time he had seen the four boys escaping with them. He remembers Jeongin's youthful gaze, Seungmin's silent gratitude, Felix's brightness and Jisung's apprehension, his violent and scared nature.

Thinking of them from back then to now makes Changbin feel rather proud. They all had come far. Jisung had slowly learnt how to be human again, how to trust. He became a parent, felt love and then gave it back.

That white building looks unchanged.

But Changbin will not allow it to stay that way.

—

Where the people in the slums had accepted their presence quickly, the people inside the city are cautious at their approach.

The people in the slums had been starved, given a sentence that meant death when they closed off the contact with them for once and for all. But these people up here had been cool in the summers, warm in the winters and fed. They have known the tyranny of the government, have lived through the harsh regulations and the horrors of man made diseases and public executions.

However, it doesn't take them long to decide their fate when the first shots are fired.

In the chaos, several people are shot and wounded badly. The toll of the injured grow when more soldiers appear and the citizens panic and get themselves shot in the process. It grows out of hand quickly and they have to make a decision to call doctors down on the scene to help them on the ground for emergency treatment before they can get them to safety on the escape ships.

Hyunjin leaves the ship, passing a communication device to Kaya who instantly takes over in place of the young medic.

Valkyrie helps him once she finds him within the crowd by guarding the many injured with a unit of their own surrounding the medics for protection.

All units of The Capitals soldiers contain those shaky and hesitant ones. Chan had informed others that the youth and healthy that disappeared from the slums must have been forced to enlist.

Some of them begin to surrender out of fear when their shock guns take down soldiers.

The higher ups in their military reprimand them and force them to stay. They would've taken them in, taken their weapons away, removed their armour and packed them into the ships if they could've. They were innocents of this society, forced to work for the government that demanded more than they could give.

They have the main entry to The Capital secured. The same road that links up to Minho's childhood home is filled with their forces and it creates an exit point for all the injured victims of cross fire.

Hyunjin bandages wounds, disinfects injuries that could become easily infected in the current climate of The Capital.

Some of the injured have to be carried into the ships. Some are unconscious due to shock or blood loss. Others too injured to move by themselves and the victims of shock are unable to ground themselves.

There is no break in the gun fire. The loud bangs fill the air, never ending and Hyunjin thinks he might hear this sound forever. Maybe he'd hear it in his sleep like everyone else here today. Maybe in the peace and quiet he will remember all of this. The carnage and the metallic scent of blood hanging thickly in the air.

Hyunjin moves to a young woman who is clutching her forearm.

Blood coats her hand that is gripped tightly around her arm, blood spilling down her fingers onto the worn skirts of her dress.

Instead of a bullet wound Hyunjin had prepared himself to treat, when he pries her fingers away he finds torn flesh, as if she had got stuck in a fence and pulled her way through, ripping her flesh apart in the process.

“I saw the ships,” she blubbers out, eyes shutting and jaw tensing when Hyunjin cleans the wound, flushing it out. Her hiss is loud but she bites down onto her lip to keep her moans of pain at bay. “So I came to find someone to help,” she looks up at him through glazed eyes as he begins to wrap up her arm. “You’re Hwang Hyunjin,” she says and Hyunjin stares at her. She doesn’t look familiar to him. Her light hair is messy, stained with dirt and blood that covers her. Her eyes, a deep brown don’t ignite any memory of her.

“You saw my mother when I was a girl, once.” She says. “Before the awful disease... when you were fresh in your medical training... Can you help me? Please?” Her eyes are wide, worry swimming through them.

“I have to stay to take care of people,” he tells her. “I can get some of close friends to talk with you?”

“Please,” she whispers and Hyunjin nods before he stands on slightly shaky legs. “Val,” Hyunjin calls out and his wife turns at the sound of his voice. Those piercing eyes of hers soft as she looks at him.

“This is my wife Valkyrie,” he introduces her quickly. “She says she

needs help,”

Valkyrie nods once and bends to become face-to-face with the other woman. Her eyes light up at the sight of Valkyrie.

“We have not all been taken by the disease?”

“No,” Valkyrie answers with a soft smile. Hyunjin senses the sadness beneath it.

He doesn’t linger around, the pained cries of people around him alert him that they too need help.

“You are clearing out the city, yes?” She asks quickly. Valkyrie nods at her. The woman heaves in a deep breath. “My name is Annie,” she tells Valkyrie. “When the disease first started and the government start speaking about ways to increase the population me and some other women escaped. There’s a bunker that we built to keep us safe... we cannot escape alone,”

“Hang on,” Valkyrie’s eyes narrow. “How many women to you think there are in there?”

Annie gulps and pauses in thought for a second. “Perhaps forty,”

“Forty!?” Valkyrie gasps out. Annie looks at her with wide eyes. “We shouldn’t stay any longer! That disease, it picks off women like bees

in the winter,”

“Wait, Annie,” Valkyrie hurries after Annie who rushes to her feet. “We cannot go alone. I can’t protect forty women from oncoming gunfire,”

“I need to save them,” she pleads. “I know,” Valkyrie murmurs. “I will get back up, now make sure you remember how to get back. We’ve got one shot and one shot only,”

Valkyrie arrives with Minho, Jeongin, Chan and Odin as well as his own unit of warriors all hailing from Scalva. Jeongin pulls along another armoured unit and their tally equals up to fifty.

“Okay, where is this bunker?” Minho asks, pocketing his guns. “On the outskirts of the testing facility,”

Minho visibly pales at that.

“The big white building?” Jeongin presses on and the woman nods. “There wasn’t ever a lot of people over that way. It was a good place to hide, but it is hard to escape from. The wall is too high to climb and there are too many soldiers to run all the way here all together!”

“I’m calling a ship from the fields,” Chan speaks, already pressing his fingers to the device in his ear. “Empty carrier ship to report to the

north end of the city. Near the institution. Follow these orders when I call back,”

“Affirmative,”

“Right,” Jeongin nods his head. “Get between us and lead the way,”

The city is packed full of the soldiers. Odin and his crew take the task of knocking out all the soldiers that appear or follow them. And as they loom closer to the white building, the excessive amount of guards around isn't a pleasant surprise but its also not much of a surprise.

They have Jisung and Felix after all.

The path is dangerous and it's clear Annie knows this too. She clutches her injured hand to her chest, eyes darting around wildly as they near that looming white building.

Minho has a memory of his youth, with him and Chan on the floor of his childhood bedroom, surrounded by books Chan had taken from their school library. Chan would read and read and Minho would dismantle anything he found abandoned on the walk to and from school. It was these moments that Minho had begun to understand machinery and the intricates of technology and Chan had picked up facts and read stories, ones of heroes that had perhaps awoken his own heroics.

There was a day in particular that Minho had been pulling apart the motor of the smallest mower his family owned— much to the dismay of his father, he had repeatedly asked his son to not get grease stains on the floor, but it always feel on deaf ears—and Chan had his nose buried in a book. “They say white is a pure colour,” Chan announced, breaking the calm silence takeaway the creaks and groans from the small machine surrounding his younger friend. “They put meaning on colours now?” Minho had grunted out a laugh. “No, it’s not new. From the beginning of humanity symbols were an important part of life. Black, death and darkness so I guess white is the opposite. Purity and birth, perhaps?”

But now, the sight of that white building has changed Minho’s outlook on life. White is not pure, it doesn’t symbolise freedom or rebirth. To him it looks like destruction, like oppression and like pain.

This city is a blank greyscale of torture.

Annie leads them away from the institution suddenly, turning to the wall and rushing to the edge where sunburnt grass lines the fence line. That wire fence that lines the institutions gardens, the same fence they had once climbed and then thrown Jisung off the wall on the other side extends and cages in a dry grassland. Theres a hazardous looking gap in the thick wire fence and Minho spots remnants of blood around some of the wire. Annies blood, no doubt.

The young woman gestures for them to enter the gap in the fence and she slides through with a small struggle this time.

Valkyrie slips in after her, much smoother and faster but the rest of them look at each other. “You are not going to fit,” Valkyrie tells her

father and he laughs softly. “Ever so observant, my daughter,” Odin chuckles quietly.

Her father steps forwards and bends, tucking his metal plated knee through the gap in the fence. Annie cannot stay still behind Valkyrie, too nervous and full of adrenaline to calm down.

The burly man stretches out and rips a larger hole through the fence, then slides another leg in and widens it even further. Minho grips onto the top and pushes with all of his strength, opening the top higher. Hyunjin and Chan as well as a few of Odin’s men help and soon enough the gap is big enough for a man Odin’s size to enter and exit with little effort.

“Quickly, it is just here,” Annie gestures them over to a small drop off in the landscape and she hastily pulls away a roll of sticks covered in dead, dry grass to reveal a small hole into the ground. “A bunker,” she says. “We found it and expanded to the best of our abilities for us all,” she tells them, nursing her injury to her chest. “It was home for years,” she whispers before stepping back.

“Please,” she whimpers out. “Please save all my sisters in there,”

“You are not coming?” Jeongin asks her and Annie bites down onto her lip. “We have not come out in a long time,” she whispers. “Only the farmer knew where this was and left found each week for us... if we came out, even one of us, we’d catch it and bring it back... someone had to sacrifice themselves to save everyone,” Annie says quietly before she takes a step back. “I cannot go in, not anymore,”

Valkyrie stares at the woman with sad eyes.

“Annie,” Jeongin starts softly. “The disease,” he mutters, swallowing the rock that feels like its jammed itself in his throat. “Its gone,”

Annie blinks at him, shaking her head. “But—“

“They made it,” Minho states. “They made it themselves and killed everyone to gain control. They wiped it out themselves. No one has died in months,”

“No,” she whispers, her legs shaking and her breath faltering. “It can’t be true...”

“I’m sorry,” Valkyrie whispers before she reaches for Hyunjin’s hand and goes down on her hands and knees, and crawls into the bunker.

It doesn’t take long for Valkyrie to see people. Even in the limited light in the bunker, its impossible to not see the forms of women huddling together and trying to comfort each other while the sounds of constant gunfire echo in the air above them.

“Hello,” Valkyrie says softly and the moment her accented voice fills the women’s ears, they seem to relax at the foreign voice, knowing instantly shes not from The Capital and going to take them to either their demise or forced into a life her four younger friends had once lived.

“It’s safe to come out,” she tells them, sitting on the balls of her feet and allowing the women to take a good look at her. Their eyes linger mostly on the scare that goes down majority of the length of her face. “You won’t get sick but it is going to be dangerous in other ways. My husband, he is a doctor, if any of you are injured he will look after you with his crew once we have you safely on a ship boarded towards freedom.”

“Where are you from?” A brave woman calls, her voice, although clearly weak from the struggles of living in her is strong. “From a place that remains in a perpetual winter,” Valkyrie’s tone borderlines humour and it sends a small snicker throughout the bunker. “My name is Valkyrie Gulljord, From Scalva and I will make sure you all get on that ship safely and find freedom.” She gives them a smile. “And perhaps the gift of the sun,”

Valkyrie gains the trust of the women quickly and within a few minutes, all the women slowly emerge from the bunker.

Annie keeps her distance, however, still clutching her hand.

Minho calls for the ship to hurry on over while there aren’t any soldiers in sight. One by one, Jeongin helps women get to their feet as they exit the bunkers, eyes sore from the shock of sunlight and he leads them to others that help them to the gap in the fence thats guarded by Odin and his men to await the ship to carry them away safely.

Annie’s estimate of forty women is accurate and just as the last five in the bunker crawl out blindly, the ship docks in the empty space next to the intuition, an open get guarded space. They would have to hurry to ensure everyone’s safety.

Valkyrie looks behind her shoulder as soon as they begin to run to the ship that has its doors wide open and a whole other force guarding the entrance from any sneaking soldiers. Annie is stood at the fence, her eyes tightly shut as she cries silently. Valkyrie signals Minho that shes going back for her and he gives her nod, helping a particularly weak woman hobble along on spindly legs to the ship.

“Annie,” Valkyrie whispers quietly, rubbing the young woman’s shoulder. “Come on, we can offer a secluded space if its what you really want. I’m sure the pilot wouldn’t mind if you sat with them instead,”

“I’m so confused,” she cries out. “How could they do this all?”

Valkyrie feels her heart clench. The pain that the government has caused them all will perhaps never heal. Generations of gaping wounds, a festering pain in their hearts and deep in their souls. If she were back in Scalva the womanhood would hold a ceremony to call the healing winds, to soothe and heal all of wounds the eye cannot see. Then they would call the goddess and call her to take care of the deceased, to guide them through their journey of rebirth.

Valkyrie had called the goddess once. By herself on the bitterest day in the most brutal winter the people of Scalva have ever endured. Snow clung to her hair, her coats fur frozen to the locks at the back of her head as she stood in a clearing.

Her mother had left the living world but the icy wind that caressed her cheeks had reminded Valkyrie of her mother. The days when she taught her how to make her own arrows from her surroundings, that

same arrows that had pierced down her largest snow lion.

It had given her peace and Valkyrie hopes that the people of The Capital will find comfort in something once this is all over.

“I know its hard to understand,” Valkyrie tells her gently. “And I know that it hurts, but first, we need to get you safe, okay?”

“But how can I trust that its really gone?”

“I dont know,”Valkyrie answers honestly. “But what I know is that ship is where you will be safe will all of those women, please Annie, please trust us,”

She offers her hand for Annie to take and the young woman stares at her with misty eyes. “Okay,” she croaks out.

Minho hears it before he sees it.

The loud bang of gunfire rings through his ears and a scream follows close behind. He immediately pushes the closest women to the ground and covers them as best as he can with his body Ashe searches for the source of the scream.

Annie is on the ground, clutching her side as she cries out. Blood is gushing out of her at an alarming rate and Minho looks for Hyunjin. His face tells it all. Annie grows pale and her hands shake. Valkyrie is

on the ground beside Annie, clutching at her side, her brows furrowed.

“Valkyrie!” Hyunjin runs towards his wife and the heavily wounded Annie.

A group of white soldiers appear across the grasslands, guns raised and ready to fire once more. Minhø shuffles arounds and covers the women closest to him. Jeongin and Chan follow him quickly and cover as many as they can.

“On the ground!” Minhø shouts.”GO! GO! GO!”

The women are crying and screaming at the commotion around them. Minhø turns back and fires at the but they all dodge his hits.

“Chan! Jeongin! Get them on the ship, I’ll cover you and try to help Hyunjin!”

“We’ll be there once they’re safe!” Chan shouts back.

Hyunjin presses his hands to Valkyrie’s face. “Val,” he whimpers. “I’m okay,” she breathes out. “It just grazed me, but Annie—“ More gunfire rings out and Valkyrie forces herself up and plasters herself to Hyunjin’s back, shielding him.

“What are you doing?” He hisses at her. “Stop it,”

“No,” her nails dig into his shirt. “Annie,” she says looking over at deathly pale girl.

“Go,” Annie cries softly. “Just go, please,” she says weakly. The life in her eyes is fading at the pool around her dirty skirts is alarming. Even Valkyrie knows there is no hope for her now.

Hyunjin gulps and presses his hands to her wound. “Its a clean exit,” he says through gritted teeth. The world rings around him. All he can see if the life draining out of the girl, through his fingers, thick and warm and startling red.

“Hyunjin!” Valkyrie yells, pulling him back to his senses.

“It’s got her organs,” he whispers. “I know,” Valkyrie tightens her hold around him.

Annie’s breathing is shallow, peaceful in a way. They both know she’s bleeding out and the risk of moving her and causing her more pain to probably only get shot again on the move puts Hyunjin into a contradicting position. He could leave her and let her fade away with the sudden peace a blood loss victim will eventually feel. Or he could take her in his arms and risk not just her getting shot again, but himself and his wife.

“Go,” Annie pleads once more, barely awake.

Hyunjin has seen death before. He had seen his grandfather die, surrounded by the rest of his family, peaceful and calm. And then the jarring difference of the first influx of victims of the disease.

That was far from peaceful. Horrific and gruesome. Many people had seen people die such horrible deaths, ones that shouldn't have happened in the first place. The way the disease infected the wombs recreated the way a womb would swell when carrying a child, Hyunjin had to remind him several times that Jisung would be fine and he was not infected and that he was carrying a child within his body instead of harbouring a deadly disease. The high fever, trying to fight a never ending battle and the excessive blood loss and septic that caused many more symptoms after the womb eventually died within the bearer.

Annie shuts her eyes, looking like she's simply fallen asleep.

Hyunjin struggles to his feet, but he pulls of his gun and shoots back as he runs to the ship.

—

When they don't come back with Annie, everyone knows that she hadn't made it. Minho pats his friends shoulder while Valkyrie envelops him in a hug. His chin rests on the top of her head, his eyes blank.

The ship is hovering over the town square now, letting down a ladder for several people panicking in the square. Jeongin helps each person up by clutching onto their hands and heaving them up the last few steps quicker.

Minho goes to help Jeongin and Chan lingers around the married couple.

“Hyunjin, it wasn’t your fault,” he says quietly. “I know that,” Hyunjin murmurs. “I just didn’t have enough time or enough luck to save her,”

“She was ready to die,” Valkyrie suddenly says. “She went out thinking she was going to end up dead. To save all those women, she went out and sacrificed herself just so they could be safe,” Hyunjin clutches his wife tighter and Chan wraps an arm around his shoulders. “Are you okay Valkyrie?” Chan asks and the Scalvian woman. She looks at him softly, her icy eyes hardened slightly by a twinge of sadness. “It grazed me,” she says. “Annie took it,” she reveals quietly. “She pushed me away and took the hit not knowing that I would’ve survived it because of the armour,”

“I’m sorry,” Chan whispers but the woman can only sigh. “I will shall call for the goddess when the next snow comes,” comes her reply.

Jeongin gazes at the institution, too many thoughts racing through his mind as he begins to call to the pilot to raise the ladder when the sound of metal clanging alerts him. He looks around the ship and finds an odd ball sitting a few centimetres away from him. A frown mares between his brows and he picks it up. Its heavy in his hand and he flinches when it beeps in his palm. He looks down at the square below and finds several white soldiers staring up at the ships

open doors as they hover in the air.

The odd ball beeps again and it gets Minhó's attention.

"Jeongin!" He shouts and snatches the odd thing from his hand and then throws it as hard as he can.

The younger tucks himself close to his friend when it suddenly bursts into flames, eliciting a deafening boom and blowing up the government tower closest to the explosion.

Jeongin meets Minhó's eyes and gulps.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi everyone I hope you're all doing well during this time.

On a lighter note I'm nearing completing this fic!! I have four chapters left to write out ahhh I am quite busy between working in art projects but I'm excited and it should be done soon!!

With love- starsprout ☆☐🌿

For as long as Jisung will live, he will never forget the feeling of this mattress beneath his body. He had cried on his mattress, bled and slept on this very mattress for seven years. Jisung thinks sleeping outside on compacted earth for eight months—even while heavily pregnant and when he could never get comfortable and when he'd feel Eunbyul twisting around inside of him—was more comfortable than the sorry excuse of a bed. Springs poke into his back and it leaves a bruising feeling whenever he moves even the slightest bit.

His eyelids are heavy, his mind hazy but some conscious part of him knows its the drug fading in his system.

When he manages to finally open his eyes, his vision is blurred at the edges but he can make out these walls perfectly fine. Fear spikes in him, like spikes of hot flashes of pure fear. He forces himself to breathe out heavily, his fingernails digging into the soft skin of his palms as he tries to ground himself.

This won't be like it was last time. He wouldn't allow it. Not to him or to anyone else.

He pulls his body off the bed and when his bare feet hit the cold ground, panic flares up in him. He looks around the four walls and his heart feels as if it's caught in his throat.

He lets out a gasp and his knees weaken beneath his weight but he braces himself, keeping himself upright.

Jisung breathes in heavy and slowly exhales, trying to calm the rapid

beating of his heart.

Nothing has changed. The bed is in the same spot, with the lone blanket he used for seven years, tattered and fraying at the edges. With shaking hands, he reaches for it and holds it close to his chest. He's still wearing the clothes he had at the time they took him, but there's something wrapped around his wrist, a faint green light flickering.

Jisung doesn't have to guess what it is. They could have put the same tracking device they had when he was fifteen—the implant beneath his skin in his thigh—but Jisung knows why they hadn't. He had ripped out that tracker without second thought—he still has the scar to prove it—but this thing around his wrist is not going to come off so easily.

With a sudden groan, the heavy metal door to his room opens and the nurse that had treated him so many times throughout the night is standing in the doorway.

"It's been a while, Jisung," he says. He comes into the room quickly, shutting the door behind him. It beeps to show its locked at the light at the top of the door turns red. Jisung clenches his jaw.

"Now, are you going to be good and let me to what I have to do or am I going to have to call for backup?" He narrows his eyes at him and Jisung shuffles back until his knees hit the firm mattress behind him.

"There are two options," the nurse says to him. He pulls his cart of

supplies closer. “You listen and do everything I need to or we call for backup,” Jisung stiffens. “And you’ve never liked that option, haven’t you?”

Either a drug to knock him out or a guard comes and pins him down. Neither are good options.

So, slowly, he sits on his bed, tucks his knees to his chest and waits for his next instruction. “An ultrasound is needed. To see what shape your uterus is in now after your stupid run away from here. Honestly, what were you thinking. You were in a fragile state and you were our best bet.”

“Don’t talk to me like what you were doing was for the good of society.” Jisung spits. “I know more than you’ll ever think I do,”

Jisung isn’t stupid enough to wait around for him to tell him to lay down. He does it himself and exposes his abdomen to the nurse. With his lip between his teeth, he waits for the man to set up the portable machine.

“And what about that implantation we did before you ran away?” He spits it out at him. “We were going to do the blood test that morning to discover the results,” Jisung clenches his jaw. “We have not had any other pregnancies since you,” he says and Jisung feels relief flood through his veins.

They can save those other boys from the same fate he suffered from.

“If you stay silent we’ll have to assume things,” the nurse warns.

“Oh, I’m not going to tell you anything,” Jisung spits out. He laughs. “It’s nice to finally hear your voice after so long,” he squirts gel onto his stomach. He eyes the faded marks on his skin and he chuckles to himself. “Where’s that baby, then?” His tone is poisonous, and Jisung senses the ill intent and it makes his blood boil. Because he’s threatened Eunbyul. Even though Jisung knows they’ll never get her, his daughter is everything to him. He will protect her and not allow them to even know her precious existence.

“Not anywhere where you can touch them,” he spits out and with a swift movement he jumps up on the bed and with the heavy bracelet on his wrist, he bashes it against the mans temple. Pain stings against wrist, possibly breaking his skin from the impact but he doesn’t care. Not know.

The man buckles from the impact, giving Jisung enough time to leap from his bed, take the portable machine and promptly knocks the man over the head with it. He thumps to the ground and for a moment Jisung is afraid he’s killed him, but his chest moves with his breathing and he sighs out. As much as Jisung hates that man, he will never be low enough to have blood on his hands.

He takes a moment to compose himself with a few deep breaths and then he’s searching the mans pockets for the keycard he knows he has on him. He finds it in his breast pocket and snatches it.

Jisung dashes to the door, scans the barcode on the keycard and the door clicks open.

He laughs back at the man. “No keycard...” he pulls the door shut behind him, leaving the nurse unconscious in the locked room, no way to get until he wakes and pages someone to help him. Though, Jisung knows that’ll be some time since theres no way he’s going to recover quickly from the hit he took to his head. That machine was quite heavy.

The hallway is empty and it is eerily quiet like it always had been. Jisung shoves the keycard into his pocket by his hip and runs through the halls, hoping that he’s not going to run into one of those white guards.

He finds Felix’s room quickly thanks to the model he spent countless hours studying with his friends. He hadn’t ever been here before but he knows his way around this place. Its too uniform for it to be difficult to find rooms, too similar to everything he’s seen before to confuse him to where he’s going.

He skids to a halt at the closed door and gets the keycard out of his pocket hastily and the door opens with a soft beep. Jisung pushes the door open and rushes in. Felix is sat on his bed, hands on lap as he waits patiently for his friend to come in and let him out.

“Now how the hell did we guess that they’d go to you first?” Felix laughs at him and Jisung snorts as he kicks the door open. “Good guess, I think. Now, remember everything, right?”

“I certainly do,” Felix stands from his bed and smiles.

“There’s no other boys on this floor. It’s all down from here,” Jisung

says, recalling all the other empty room along his way to Felix. And the only floor above was used for storage.

Suddenly, he thinks back on the horrified look on Minho's face as they caught him—or when he ran into their grip—and his heart clenches. He knows he's going to worry until he sees him again and part of him hurts for causing his lover to worry, but they knew this was going to happen for weeks. It had been almost as freighting for himself as well, but knowing that is was going to happen for quite sometime before hand helped ease the shock.

“Well then,” Felix cracks his knuckles. “I’m ready. Are you ready?”

“Not really,” Jisung answers honestly. But it’s the honest truth. Theres a pit of anxiousness inside of him but he wont let that take control. These boys need them and Jisung will not give up on them.

“Fair enough,” Felix reaches for his hand and embraces him quickly. “We stick all together. No one can stray.” Felix reminds him. Jisung nods his head.

“Jisung,” Felix suddenly says after Jisung is almost out of the door. “I have to tell you something,”

Jisung turns on his heels to face his best friend. He forces a soft smile, expecting his friend to confide to him that he's terrified— Jisung would then admit he is too but they have each other— but Felix doesn't say anything, instead he reaches for Jisung's hand and places it on his stomach.

Jisung feels his own stomach churn.

“Felix...” he mutters. Felix gulps. “Are you sure?”

“Very,” Felix confirms.

“Felix, why didn’t you tell me?” Jisung stares at his friend in shock. “You shouldn’t have come,”

“Because I knew you would say that,” Felix points out. “I think for good reason!” Jisung cries out quietly. “You’re pregnant? Does Chan know?” Jisung bites down onto his lip.

“Of course not,” Felix scoffs. “Do you think he would’ve even let me board a ship if he knew I was pregnant?”

Something suddenly clicks in Jisung’s mind. “Hang on,” he points an accusing finger to his friend who grimaces at him back. “That talk we had the other day, was that all because of this?”

“I was going to tell you, but I thought you wouldn’t allow me to come either,”

“I can’t control you, Felix,” Jisung exasperates and Felix raises a brow. “But you can do what you’re doing know,” He points out.

“Felix, this is dangerous,” Jisung’s voice turns quiet. “I know that, I really do,” Felix squeezes Jisung’s hands. “But you, when you were pregnant you did a lot more than what we’re going to do within a day. You did eight months of strenuous work,”

“Don’t compare us like that, I didn’t know before and we simply didn’t have a choice, Felix,”

Felix bites down on his lip. “You’re my best friend, Jisung,” Felix says. “And you are mine,” Jisung frowns.

“When you first said you wanted to do this I was against it because all I wanted was to finally live a peaceful life but because you are my best friend I realised this was the right thing to do. To support you and help you. I wasn’t keen at the start, but look how far we have come. I cannot stop here just because I’m pregnant,”

“Felix...”

“I would do anything for you, do you know that? I once thought I was going to lose you, you’ll never know how that feels, I promise you.”

Jisung’s bottom lip wobbles and he pulls Felix into a bear hug. “We couldn’t just stop now, we have suffered too much to not go ahead with this.” Felix pulls away from the hug and gently places his own palm over Jisung’s abdomen. “This will not just be for nothing. They may have changed us and I know we’ve had our differences but we can take something back from this. Something better than they ever thought was possible. The moment you knew that Eunbyul was

nestled in you, I knew you loved her. It might've taken you time to realise that, but I know it. And when you felt her... when you saw her for the first time, when you first held her, feed her, that is joy. Something that we have now that they never would've allowed us,"

Jisung feels as if he might just break down in tears. Felix's own eyes are glassy as he speaks. "And I truly believe our future will be bright," he finishes softly with that dazzling smile of his.

"But I expect payment," Felix jokes. "You better give me another niece or nephew after this so my baby will have lots of friends,"

Jisung laughs against Felix's shoulder as his body reaches out for him on instinct. "I'm not so opposed to that now,"

"Well then, partner, we have a deal," Jisung stifles a laugh and gestures to the door.

"First, we have to conquer the top floor before I can fulfil our promise,"

"The top floor," Felix cracks his knuckles. "The storage rooms,"

Several weeks ago, Mydar

Jeongin peers around the room at everyone's crestfallen expressions until realisation dawns on him.

"That's fucking dangerous," He spits out, staring at Minh.

"I know that," Minh hisses back. "That's why I said I'm personally against it,"

"I don't think it's entirely your decision," Felix mutters. He's sitting next to Jisung now, holding onto his hand tightly.

Felix looks into Jisung's eyes and Jisung looks right back. They seem to read each other like they are an open book because next thing Jisung finds himself speaking.

"We can do it," Jisung speaks up and Felix nods in agreement.

Everyone whips towards Minh, shooting him a worried glance. He throws his hands up. "It was just a suggestion to them! If they didn't want to do it they don't have to, but if anyone can do this it's them."

"Nice to see you have hope in us," Felix muses. "How can I not?" Minh counters back and he quiets, going shy quite is rather out of

character for him to his friends but Jisung has seen this side of him several times.

“Well... the best bet isn’t going to be that we just appear at their doorstep begging to be let back in,” Jisung says after silence fills in around them. Felix grimaces at that, knowing exactly what Jisung is implying by his words.

“No fucking way,” Seungmin whispers and everyone’s a little shocked at the mellow boy and his sudden language that he never uses.

“That’s insane,” he continues. He shoots Jisung a worried look. “You’ve been taken once before, Sung... how are you... how could you want to do that,”

“If we can save them, Seungmin,” Jisung looks at him with pleading eyes. “I’ll do what it takes... even if I must remember,”

“Fuck,” Chan hisses out, running a hand through his hair. “You guys better put up an act otherwise they’ll catch on and the security in that place is going to be out of hand,”

“Not if most of the forces are trying to defend something else,” Jeongin points out.

“And that would be us squeezing our way in and taking all their people and getting through their defences. They’ll have their priorities somewhere else, that’s for sure,”

“We can only hope so,” Hyunjin finally says something. “And we can only hope my father isn’t going to pull something elaborate out of thin air and hurt you two,”

“That would be something to worry about,” Jisung nods slowly but a grimace turns up on the corner of his mouth. “But we have something they want,”

Minho gulps and Changbin cries out from the corner of the room. “You are not about to put your worth against your wombs,”

“But it is that shallow,” Felix points out and silence falls over them for a while.

“Do you really think so?”

“They’ll find out I was pregnant and find evidence I gave birth as well. They’ll look and they’ll find what they’ll want,” Jisung mutters. “It’s rather obvious,”

“What if they put another embryo in you?” Seungmin asks and Jisung’s mouth goes dry at the thought. The memory of the last two times they had done that cling to him, full of bitterness and pain. He swallows and forces a small smile. “They need to line up my cycle,” Jisung says. “They won’t be able to without having me for at least a whole month,”

“Good,” Minho says, looking over at him. Jeongin punches him in the shoulder and wiggles his eyebrows. “Yes, we know that’s your job now,”

“Shut the fuck up,” Minho warns him and he goes quiet, blinking over at Jisung as if seeking protection. “Be nice,” Jisung scolds him and Minho pouts.

“You know this might work really well,” Changbin says.

“What?” Jeongin tilts his head. “Minho getting Jisung knocked up?”

“No you imbecile,” Changbin frowns at him and Jeongin slumps in his chair. “I just want another Eunbyul, okay, can you blame me?” He wails looking over at the baby curled against Jisung’s chest, still fast asleep.

“No,” Comes a chorus and Jisung stares at Minho who simply shrugs with a small smile.

“I have been training with the spy crew... we can sneak in and help as well somehow,”

“I knew you were doing that for good reason and to not just scare me whenever I have to wake up and take a piss,” Jeongin hisses, slapping Changbin’s knee.

The institution looks bleak without all the bright white light Jisung was used to seeing it bathed in. The building lacks windows, only small barred off holes that Jisung doesn't think can even be classed as windows after seeing places like Mydar and The City of Sivra.

Minho had said the power will be off for at least a few hours with how his crew had completely broken down the power signals. It would take time to rebuild them. It inconveniences both sides, but the trouble The Capital will have with their power down will outweigh their side of struggling in the dark.

Jisung and Felix know this place well. If Jisung was blindfolded he wouldn't doubt he'd be able to find his way around with little struggle.

The storage room is a open floor at the very top of the building, secured by two high security doors, but unlucky for The Capital and for the institution, all the power signals to alert a break in are down.

All it takes to open them now is a twist of the doorknob and a push. Felix gives Jisung a sly smile as it opens.

Since their plan from the start was to be captured by the government officials and be brought back to this hell, he and Felix were the only ones to not be armed with weapons or the communication devices every other leader of a unit has. They would've been taken away

from them and caused more of an issue than anything else if the enemy could listen into their conversations. And although Jisung wishes he could hear Changbin's updates to know when he was going to appear with his crew of specially trained spies and warriors, he knows it would've caused more trouble than good.

The storage room is their last chance to get armed. The armour Rahka had designed is still covering their frames, inconspicuous from eyes that do now know of the higher technology other settlements have created. Jisung is glad, even more so now that he knows his best friend is carrying his daughters cousin.

Jisung can't blame Felix for not telling anyone until now. Had he been in his shoes, Jisung would've done the same thing to make sure he could help and get this done as smoothly as possible. And Felix is right, they've suffered too much to not take this back. This isn't just about saving everyone else to them, but its for revenge, retribution to those who had taken too much from them and expected everything back.

Jisung will give them something back. Not his daughter, not his body but he can give them the destruction he had lost himself on as soon as he jumped into Chan's arms from the wall. He can become a fiery cyclone, raining molten lava down onto them and turning their brutality into steaming rubble.

They search, tearing through piles of supplies that range from new blankets they never bothered to give out, a stockpile of syringes that they used to draw blood and inject things into them. Jisung knows those things allto well.

"Shit," Felix hisses out from across the room. "I can't find anything

but syringes that we can fight with,”

“Neither can I,” Jisung admits slowly. There’s nothing up here. No guns that Jisung had seen guards carrying in here all the time when he was locked up here. Nothing.

“It was worth a try,” he says with a twinge of fear in his tone. If they came across white soldiers within the building, they’d be defenceless, unable to protect themselves and the boys they need to save.

Felix had trained in fighting, but Jisung had been quickly taken away to do other things. But in Felix’s state, Jisung doesn’t want to shove him in front of everyone to fight.

Which then ultimately leaves Jisung with knowing what they have to do.

“I have an idea,” he announces.

“Oh dear,” Felix mumbles, his teeth tugging on his full bottom lip as he looks at his friend. “This doesn’t sound good,”

“No,” Jisung agrees quickly. “But it has a chance to work,”

“A chance,” Felix highlights and Jisung offers a weak smile. “I don’t like this,”

“Neither do I,” Jisung admits. “But we’re out of choices,”

The answer to their predicament is in the lobby.

Sneaking down the fire escape isn’t hard, it’s empty and dark but as soon as he emerges there are a group of five soldiers armed in the lobby.

Even in the dim light that comes through the few windows in the room, he’s spotted almost as soon as he enters the lobby.

They point their guns at him all too quickly and Jisung squeaks in surprise before throwing his hands up.

“I need a doctor,” Jisung says shakily, not needing to try hard to let fear bleed out in his tone. “I’m pregnant, please,”

The white gown around his body is too familiar, loose around him and leaves him feeling vulnerable even with the layer of his thin armour covering his body.

Felix had first smacked him over the head when he first announced his idea, but had quickly agreed after seeing the potential this plan had. There were gowns in the storage room that Jisung had quickly put on and Felix helped hide is under clothes on by rolling up his pants and his sleeves but he had to leave his shoes and socks behind. No patient in this place ever wore shoes. Socks were a luxury, especially in the winter when the cold chill crept in through the bricks and turned the place into an oversized igloo. Jisung did not appreciate winters here.

“You shouldn’t have left your room, kid,” one of them grunt and the use of the word ‘kid’ makes Jisung’s blood boil in his veins. Not long ago he had been a kid, a pregnant kid and he knows if they don’t succeed today, too many boys will have to suffer through what he did. And perhaps its because he is a parent now that he feels this strong need to protect them.

“I’m sorry, I just don’t feel well and the buttons weren’t working to buzz my nurse,” He continues his act, even clutching at his stomach. After Eunbyul’s birth, his stomach hadn’t flattened to what it used to be. An extra deposit of fat surrounds his lower abdomen as if its protecting his womb that housed his daughter.

“Come on,” the same one steps forwards, sighing in his mask. “I will take you back and call a nurse.”

“Thank you,” he replies meekly and trails after the solider. Jisung hadn’t expected to find the guards all together in the lobby, but he’s not complaining. The less he looked around for them, the less suspicious he seemed.

“You should be careful walking around in the dark while pregnant. The president will not be pleased if we have another boy miscarry. I did not know of that boy, that escapee, but he sounds like a piece of work,”

Jisung clenches his jaw at the mans words.

“I suppose I am quite a piece of work,” Jisung says monotone and the solider turns just as they make it to the landing where the floor to the rooms are connected to the fire escape. Right where Felix was waiting on the stairs above the landing.

“What?” The solider turns back to him and Jisung shrugs. “I hope you have a nice nap,” he says sweetly before Felix leaps down from the stairs and throws the portable ultrasound machine at his head. It cracks against his helmet with a sickening crunch and the man tumbles to the ground.

“What a good weapon,” Jisung muses. “Damn that felt good,” Felix pants out, adrenaline buzzing in his veins. “Well thats done its job, knocking out two people today.” Jisung looks at the broken machine that his nurse had tried to use on him before Jisung had done the same thing Felix had just done.

“You take the gun,” Jisung passes Felix the weapon to him. “You have the better shot, I’ll take this,” Felix takes the gun with a grimace and Jisung tugs the baton close to his side. It wouldn’t be as useful as the gun Felix carries, but Jisung will beat someone up with this glorified stick if anyone gets too close.

"I can't wait to tell my kid I knocked out a man with an ultrasound machine," Felix muses with a soft smile. "We could write a goddamned book," Jisung agrees.

"Come on, there's going to be soldiers all in the hall guarding them no doubt after our little extravaganza," Jisung tightens his hold on his baton and gestures to the heavy door.

"Strange that we didn't have guards at our rooms," Felix mutters. "But I guess they didn't expect us to recover from those drugs like that,"

"They think we're weak," Jisung reminds him. "They don't realise they should be cautious,"

"What a mistake," Felix clicks his tongue, looking down at the unconscious soldier once more. "Definitely," Jisung can't help but chuckle slightly. "Now, let's bust these boys out!"

The moment they open the door to the floor where most of the boys are being kept, a soldier spots them right away and as soon as he sees the weapons in their hands, he doesn't hesitate to shoot at them.

Jisung drags Felix behind a cart a nurse left in the hall and clutches onto his baton while Felix tries to shoot the soldier from their temporary cover.

Hopefully the shots would alert Changbin and his crew to arrive for backup quickly. But that also means that this would alert more guards.

“Shit,” Jisung hisses out just as Felix fires and shoots the man in the junction where his shoulder pads and bicep armour joins. The bullet pierces through and Felix grimaces at the scream but takes another shot, at the mans ankle this time, leaving him buckling to the ground.

“Run, run, get the other gun,” Felix whispers to him and Jisung almost trips over his own feet as he scurries to grab the weapon. The baton comes in handy when the man grabs his ankle. Dragging him to the ground, his fingers still wrapped around his gun, ready to aim at Jisung’s chest.

Jisung takes the baton and smashes it down against his covered head, cringing at the crack and then the sudden stillness of the mans body. Jisung sees his chest moving still, but his heart feels like its jammed in his throat and he might just throw it up soon. He grabs the gun and knocks down the closet door with Felix at his side, looking out for other soldiers.

When the door opens, Jisung finds a boy younger than Jeongin and Valkyrie curled in a ball, covering his ears while crying silently.

“Hey buddy,” Jisung calls quietly. “How about we get you out of here, hey?”

The boy slowly looks at him, taking in the gown Jisung still wears and his bare feet and Felix’s gear that is a stark contrast against him.

“My name is Jisung. Do you know my name?” The boy’s eyes widen then and he gapes. “The one who got away?” He finally talks and Jisung nods gesturing to Felix beside him. “And Felix,” the boy gets to his feet and nods.

“You’ll have to listen to us, okay? If bullets fire get behind us and don’t move,” Felix tells him. “This won’t be easy,”

“I understand,” the boy shuffles over, his fingers clinging onto the fabric of the gown Jisung wears. “We have to get all the others, can you help?”

“I know them,” the boy confirms.

The pounding of heavy footsteps fill Jisung’s ears and he pushes the boy out of the room, rushing to the room next to his and slamming the door open. He sees another boy curled in a corner and quickly pushes the boy next to him inside before shutting the door.

Three guards shot at them, some missing but the shots that do land on their bodies feel like harsh pokes that will leave bruises in a few hours. Jisung doesn’t care, it’s better than having a bullet through his body. They shoot back, aiming for the spots to hurt and disarm, not kill.

Felix gets two arm shots and Jisung lands a single shot the hip where a weak spot in the armour is. Felix races forwards, kicks the only standing man in the chest and Jisung watches as he falls on his two

comrades. Jisung runs over and readies his baton, ready to knock them out just as Felix goes back to the door and drags the two boys out.

“We have to be quick. That will be the only way we can get everyone safely, okay? You need to go to their rooms and gather each other one by one. Lock the doors with the manual switches until you can make sure everyone knows what’s happening and only open it if you hear three knocks, do you understand?” He gets two hurried nods before he turns back to see Jisung running back to him, an extra gun in hand.

“Take this,” he gives it to the first boy they found. “I don’t want you to have to use it but if you see one of those guards, don’t hesitate to protect yourselves, okay?”

“Okay,” the boy nods before taking his friends hand and hurrying around the corner. Jisung and Felix follow them, jumping in front when a lone soldier appears.

“In!” Jisung shouts, gesturing to the next door three meters away. The boys listen and Jisung runs for the guard as soon as the door shuts. He brings his leg up and kicks with all his strength, aiming right between the soldiers legs. His own leg throbs from the force of the kick, but the soldier is in much worse condition, clutching at his crotch while withering in agony.

He’s just about to use his fancy stick to knock him out when a sizzling sound fills the halls and the man goes still beneath him.

“Oh am I glad to see you!” Jisung yells at Changbin who still has his shock gun raised, surrounded by five others dressed in darks.

“Good timing!” Felix cheers and then knocks on the door three times, signalling for the boys to come out.

“Do you have extra armour?” Jisung asks just as the boys pour out, looking at the newcomers hesitantly. “Six body shirts,” Changbin says and a woman from The City of Sivra pulls off a backpack and throws out some armour to the boys dressed in gowns.

“Why are you dressed like that?” Changbin asks Jisung, cocking his head at his friend. “We had a little hole in our plan,” Felix says. “I knocked a man out with an ultrasound machine,”

“Oh boy,” Changbin whistles.

“Oh, yeah it’s in smithereens,” Jisung adds and Changbin purses his lips. “The man or...”

“The machine,” Felix snorts. “But I don’t think he’ll be very happy when he wakes up,”

“Come on, we shouldn’t be chit chatting at this time,” Jisung turns to the now three boys. They’re all around the same age, and much to his relief none of them look like they’re currently pregnant. “Here put this on, it will protect your body from the bullets,”

“A shirt?” One of them question. “The world is much bigger than just The Capital,” Jisung grunts out as he drapes the armour over each boy. They’re all taller than him, but Jisung feels the urge to protect them like the children they are.

“How many more of you are there?” Changbin asks them. He can’t help but feel nostalgic about this all either. After all, it really hadn’t been all too long since he broke in here the first time to get the two young men in front of him and their two other friends. These boys are younger than what Jeongin had been at the time and Changbin can see the two older boys who have spent time in here fighting the urge to smother them in affection.

The third looks the youngest so far, around the same height as Jisung and he looks as if he might burst into tears at any second. Jisung immediately puts armour over him, his hand lingering on the boys thin shoulder as if to try to comfort him somehow.

“There’s only three of us around the same... but there are two older boys as well.” The newest boy says slowly, fiddling with the armour with his fingers. “Which floor?” Felix asks. “The ground floor,” he answers. “Near the garden,”

“Oh boy,” Jisung breathes out.

“They moved them from this floor last night,” The newest boy adds on.

Jisung feels his stomach flip. “We need to hurry,” he tells Changbin.

The boys take it upon themselves to hurry behind them and Jisung can hear hushes voices talking just as several more guards appear. But this time, they have a unit of special trained forces that have the special shock guns that are much less deadly than a real gun, but easier to knock a target out.

Jisung remembers being broken out himself. When Minho broke down his door and declared he was breaking him out of this place, Jisung was torn between attacking him, following him blindly or refusing. Jisung is glad his brain had been working well that day and he chose to follow him after attacking him. He was scared then and he knows these boys are too.

But what concerns him is the two boys on the bottom floor. Not only did the lobby have many guards lingering around but Jisung had been on the bottom floor numerous times.

He had been dragged there when they first did what they called a ‘harvest’.

Jisung fears doctors are already there doing this procedure on them.

“We must be quick now,” Jisung hurries out and Felix gestures to the stairwell. “What a grand entrance we could’ve made if the power was on,” he sighs. Jisung just shakes his head at him.

They're lucky that the spy unit was so well trained.

As soon as they make it to the ground floor, bullets are flying everywhere. Felix and Jisung are ducking and pulling the boys close while the unit shields them, firing the shock guns without hesitation and taking most of them down like they're not the highly trained white soldiers The Capital loved to remind their citizens by sudden street executions.

In the dark, several of the boys trip over the unconscious bodies of the soldiers that had just firing at them but Jisung and Felix help them back to their feet, knowing exactly where to go to find the two last boys.

"Across the hall from the gardens," Jisung tells the unit ahead of them. "There's a larger room with a higher security door where they'll be,"

"How do you know that?" One of the boys ask, his brows furrowed tightly.

"I spent lots of time there," Jisung answers softly, giving the young boy a sad look.

The gardens look exactly the same, a glorified space to make them believe they had some sense of freedom here. But it was all a facade. There's light here from the taller windows that show off the gardens, again, some sick design to hide the ugly truth this building holds.

When they make it to the door, it's locked manually as well through a fingerprint scanner. And they do not have a key for the door.

"Well," a woman from Changbin's team starts off slowly. "I made a living by pick pocketing before I signed up for the army," she's the woman from The City of Sivra. "I can get us in easy,"

Changbin gestures for her to go ahead and she pulls a pin from her hair. Her dark hair falls from its updo and tumbles down her back. And within a minute she picks the lock.

"I guess robbery isn't so bad after all," Changbin chirps and the woman flushes, grimacing.

The door creaks open and Jisung lets out a long breath when he sees two figures clothed in the same gown he and the other five boys wear.

"They're here to save us!" The first boy exclaims. "Come quickly! We can leave with them! It's Jisung and Felix, the two you broke out before us!"

The two boys that were locked in the room closest to the operating theatre spring up at the boys' words and race towards them without hesitating. Jisung wonders what type of rumours had spread about

them for them to be so trusting so quickly. Not that he minds, it makes it such easier to save them this way.

“You came just at the right time,” the taller of the two says, eyes wide. “Our retrieval was going to be tomorrow,” he then takes a look out of the window, his mouth falling open. “Actually today, probably in a few hours,” he corrects himself after being able to see the light.

“Or perhaps a few minutes,” Changbin hisses and Jisung turns to see a doctor staring at them, guards flanking him.

“I do not recall giving anyone permission to storm into this building,” the doctor calls out and Jisung grits his teeth.

“And I don’t recall you ever giving anyone in this fucking building an option,” Jisung spits.

“Ah, I’ve heard of you, Jisung,” he says and knowing that this doctor knows him by name sends a chill down his spine.

“I suppose a lot more than you want your friends to know?” The doctor smiles slyly. “I know your history, when you were fifteen you —“

“I do not care what you have to say,” Jisung hisses out. “I do not care that you know what was done to me but I will not allow you to do the same things to these boys,”

“Ah,” the doctor muses and looks into Jisung’s eyes. He must see the fire burning within him because his lips pull back, agitation filling his eyes. “It seems that maternal awakening drug does work,” he cocks his head. “Or perhaps you finally held onto an embryo and gave birth?”

“Shut up,” he hisses, warningly.

“So it must be true,” he doctor continues. The guards are still at his side, quiet as if waiting for his instructions that have yet to come. “You’ve had a baby... how old would they be now... considering you didn’t spread your legs for a man you escaped with,” his eyes flicker to Changbin and then he laughs.

Jisung feels Felix slip his hand into his, an attempt to help calm his friend.

“You were a good addition to our cause. Much better than everyone else. You were prefect for the program,”

“Don’t speak of the program,” Jisung hurries out, now panicked. He hadn’t forgotten about what they wanted to do after he showed he could carry a pregnancy. He doesn’t want the boys to hear the despicable things he was going to be dragged into.

“Oh? You are ashamed of that? But you were so perfect,” he coos. “I’ve even seen it myself,” Jisung feels as if he’s going to be sick. His stomach churns and shame burns through him, but he feels violated

again, just like when his old doctor— Hyunjin's father— had parted his bare thighs and brushed his hands over his skin. Jisung shivers.

“Go,” he whispers to Felix. “Take the boys, quickly,”

Felix doesn't fight him, he rounds the boys up and with half of Changbin's unit, they begin to move away. The doctor then signals the guards to do something and as soon as the first bullet flies, Changbin has taken two down already.

“Go! Go!” Changbin yells. His crew take them down easily and Jisung feels satisfaction burn through him when he watches the old man tumble to the floor, unconscious.

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay going to be totally honest i forgot about this for a few weeks AA in my defence it has been hectic, the floods were really scary and we were told to pack to evacuate and luckily it stopped around eight houses so we were okay and then my sister caught Covid lol. No one else caught it in the house but it was stressful lol

Anyways!! Im hoping that i can get my shit together soon!! I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and feel some type of relief that Jisung and Felix are stupid and reckless enough to pull that one off!! Also that one person who thought Felix was going to end up pregnant around this time... lol

As soon as Jisung's mind registers that there is no current threat that can follow them out, he turns quickly on his heels, Changbin by his side as they run towards the group in the near distance.

Jisung's bare soles hit the cool floor beneath him, sending waves of shock up his nerves but he ignores it and puts his mind into getting these boys on a ship and making sure they're safe. But it's hard to ignore the bitter taste in his mouth. The words that doctor Jisung had never seen in the institution had got to him. He knew so much about him, and the dark history this place has cast upon him. Jisung tries to forget about all the things they had in stall for him. That if he could hold onto an embryo via artificial implantation, they would then go on to use different methods that he feared. He told Felix about it when he was angry, that they weren't just making them to carry children, but to make them appealing to a male gaze.

Jisung knew what that doctor meant. He forces himself to run faster, nearing the exit to the white building that's nothing but a shadow of grey without its bright lights. If Minho had not broken into his room that day, in the morning he would've been presented a positive pregnancy test—much different to the way he would eventually find out about his pregnancy—and he would've been monitored closely until the day his daughter was born. He probably would not have been able to name her, not able to bestow a name that signified hope, he wouldn't have been able to hold her so close and to care for her like he had. Eunbyul would've grown up without him, in chains like he was. And then he'd be thrown into something akin to a whore house disguised as a government facility. And the cycle would continue, endlessly until he was no longer fertile.

But Minho had broken in. Eunbyul was born, loved and cared for and every day he would love her, and eventually she would gain another

father, just as loving and protective as the man that carried her in his womb that he once hated with a burning passion.

Beside him, Changbin is shouting something with his fingers pressed to his ear, alerting someone that has access to the communication devices.

The doors open with little struggle and Jisung and Changbin catch up with the rest of the group.

“A ship is coming, okay? Just near the grassy clearing west of here, okay? You guys need to make it there without alerting too many people,” Jisung thinks he senses fear in Changbin’s voice, some type of urgency that wasn’t there before, but Jisung’s own heartbeat is loud in his ears.

“What’s wrong?” He asks Changbin before he can even register his words. Changbin looks at him, bottom lip between his teeth and he shakes his head softly.

“Nothing.” He answers. “There’s been a ship on stand by since Felix and Jisung were captured. It’ll be here soon, so we should get moving before they spot it too quickly,” He says, pointing in the general direction the ship will come from.

Jisung takes a look at the boys, huddled together and teeth chattering with adrenaline. Jisung feels similar to them and he then realises that he’s left both his socks and boots somewhere in the storage room. All the new boys are barefooted as well and Jisung just hopes the ground isn’t too harsh on their softened feet.

They move as quietly as they can, but the boys are skittish as Jisung had been when he was first broken out and the noises surrounding them aren't so pleasant. There are screams that cut through the air, heavy and long and the sound of persistent gun fire is not comforting in the slightest.

They break out into a run and Jisung finds himself beside the tallest boy, who unconsciously grips onto his hand, tight. Jisung allows him to hold his hand, giving him some comfort during this highly stressful moment in his life.

He flinches at each loud noise and Jisung finds himself in a similar situation. The noise is foreign to him, he hadn't heard much gun fire in his childhood. He had never heard the screams of terror for so long, but he stays strong, clamps down on that boys hand and runs.

It would've been ideal if the ship had landed close and they could board it without alerting anyone from The Capital, but Jisung's luck has seem to run out for today.

As soon as the ship is in distance, beginning to hover down to land on the grassy field, a group of soldiers spot them somehow and rush in on them.

Jisung tries to hurry them along but along the fence line, where a gapping hole is in the wire as if someone had forced their way in or out, a young woman is slumped over, a pool of blood surrounding her.

The boy they first rescued trips over his own feet at the sight of the lifeless woman and he cries out. Jisung's own chest tightens. They new casualties would occur, they were storming the place where they killed thousands upon thousands for control after all. But they had hoped to do this with as little blood spilled as possible.

Jisung feels tears prick in his eyes but he adverts his attention to the pile of boys on the floor that fell over one another.

It's precious time they waste, falling over each other and struggling back to their feet, distraught at the sight of the body near them.

Changbin and his team try to hold off the crowd of soldiers but they are outnumbered by at fifteen more soldiers than their quaint rescue team. They run closer and just as the boys get to their feet, Jisung pushes Felix to run with them to the nearly landed ship.

"Go! I'll be right with you!"

Felix seems to hesitate for a seconds, but he turns quickly, ushering the boys forwards with four of Changbin's training mates for protection.

Jisung joins Changbin, trying to help him by firing his own shots but like Cala had told him, his aim wasn't too good and he misses most of them. He lands a few, but its enough for the gun to take them down, unconsciously from the shock.

“What are you doing?” Changbin hisses at him. “You should be going with them!”

“And leaving you guys down in numbers even more?” Jisung hisses back.

“We could make it!” One of Changbin’s friends yell. “If we run we can get to the ship before they catch up and get out of here!”

It’s a risky move, especially with the ship not completely landed just yet, but its a risk they’re willing to take.

They bolt towards their separated group who are waiting for the ship to get low enough to climb into.

Jisung turns back to see how much time they have before they catch up but he stumbles over a ditch in the grass and with no shoes to protect his ankles, he cries out as he feels something move in his ankle and he falls to the ground. Changbin, to Jisung’s horror, doesn’t notice he’s fallen and is running as fast as he can to the ship that’s now low enough.

“No,” Jisung mumbles and tries to get to his feet, but a hand grabs him by the gown he’s still wearing and pins him to the ground, hard.

A hand fists into his hair and he screams out as his head is yanked backwards and then he’s suddenly thrown across the ground, landing on his back with a force that knocks all of the air out of his lungs. A

white soldier throws his helmet off and Jisung stares up at the man's face. He had never been in the same room as this man before but Jisung knew exactly how he was.

The head executive of the place Jisung was going to after he showed the institution he could carry a baby. The man in charge of who was allowed in to impregnate the boys inside.

“You ruined everything,” he spits in his face. Long curly blonde hair hangs over his eyes, hazel and filled with fury. “You should’ve stayed where you were and accepted everything,” he spits in his face, looming over him.

He grips onto his bare ankle, a hand pushing on his knee to open his legs and he pins him down, his other hand curling around his throat. Jisung’s eyes are wide as he chokes and the man glares down at him, evil intentions clear. He wouldn’t kill him, he just couldn’t...

But he could.

He was capable and as his hand tightens around his throat and Jisung claws desperately at his bigger hand, staring up in his eyes does the familiarity hit him.

If he could cry out, he would. If he could scream, he would.

Those hazel eyes aren’t as wide, not as big, a different shape, something more lovely than this man’s but the similarities of them

suddenly hit him. Jisung has dark hair, dark round eyes. Eunbyul has loose curly brown hair, round and wide hazel eyes.

This man who has him in a chokehold that could potentially kill him within a few minutes fathered Eunbyul. The man must see it flash across his face, because he laughs and nods his head. “So you did have that baby,” he hisses out. “If you had stayed you would’ve known sooner, you would already be heavy again with my child within you. Did you know?” His eyes are manic and Jisung scratches desperately at his hands, trying to get air. He couldn’t die like this. He couldn’t leave his baby, not Minho and all his friends— his family behind.

“President Hwang promised me that you would be mine because I funded so much of their initial experiments,” he shoves his body closer and Jisung squeezes his eyes shut at the hand around his throat and the other pushing down on his abdomen. “You would’ve been treated well. I would’ve let you have the best room and the best clothes, food you desired... if you only had done as you should and taken this!” He roars at him.

Tearing are burning in his eyes, running down the sides of his face constantly. He can feel himself slipping, the lack of oxygen making his brain foggy and his consciousness fade.

But then comes a roar that could rival the harshest winds scraping the high snow peaked mountain in Scalva and with a flash of white, someone collides with the man and knocks him with such force that he’s thrown off of Jisung’s body.

Jisung gasps for air, holding his throat gently, scared that the man might leap back onto him.

Valkyrie's face comes into view, her pale blue eyes glazed over with concern. Her blonde hair whips around her face and her face then hardens as she sees that he's breathing and returns to the man.

Jisung can hear her fists against his face, but he lays there, looking up at the sky until Jeongin's face pokes into his vision, tears running down his own face.

"Sung," he whispers out and squats down, tucking his arms beneath his body and standing with him cradled to his chest. Jisung knew that his youngest companion had trained hard, but he hadn't realised that Jeongin had bloomed into a strong man within the time it took them to find allies. He barely resembled the young fox-eyed boy that escaped with him, young and naive about the world. The journey had hardened him, but the playful sprit inside of him is still strong regardless and that comforts Jisung.

He feels Minho's touch before he sees him. His hand cups his cheek and he presses a kiss to his forehead and after seeing he's okay, he disappears in the direction where Valkyrie and the man are in a heated fist fight.

Jeongin doesn't linger once he's got Jisung safely on the ship, especially when Odin comes running, his axe raised.

The moment he's on the ship, Felix is fretting over him and helping Jeongin to put him in one of the few medical beds each ship has for emergencies like this.

“Can you speak?” Felix asks him, covering his shivering body with a quilted blanket.

“I,” Jisung gulps, some pain lingering as he swallows, but other than that his voice seems to be fine.

“Valkyrie got there quickly,” Felix sighs out with relief. “She saw you as soon as we got the first boys in and she took off.”

“It wasn’t that long?” Jisung questions slowly, his voice is only slightly hoarse which surprises him. “Around a minute,” Felix nods and Jisung takes in some more air. “It felt longer,” he squeezes his eyes shut and searches for Felix’s hand.

Minho appears in the entryway, his chest heaving in deep breaths as if he had run back in not long after Jisung left.

Jisung locks eyes with him and wants to cry, he wants to hold him, be held by him.

That man, Jisung knows he doesn’t have the title of Eunbyul’s father. He does. And Minho had gained that role through love and his devotion.

Minho knows that look all too well and he hurries across the metal flooring, wrapping his arms around his love.

“You are so brave,” Minho tells him. “For saving them all and being so selfless...”

Minho recalls the day like it was yesterday when Jisung had nearly plummeted to his death of the side of Rahka had it not been for Noa’s quick eyes and reflexes. Seeing the white coats he remembers seeing in that place had almost caused him his life, and Minho knows beneath all that strength was naught but pure fear.

“That man,” he says quietly. “I recognise him,” he stares up at Minho, his eyes full of unshed tears. “He was one of the founders of the project... he came a few times when they decided vitro fertilisation would end up costing them too much and take away from funding... new boys to the program,” Felix looks away when he speaks. Jisung knows he had heard rumours, but having not yet had an implantation he didn’t know the facts like Jisung had.

Minho’s jaw is clenched as Jisung speaks. “They were going to use us... he... he said I was to be his,” the cold shiver that runs down his spine at the thought causes Minho to reach out and pull him into his arms. The tears fall then, hot down his otherwise chilled cheeks and prickling at his eyes. “But when I looked at him I saw her,” he sobs, wailing against Minho’s shoulder who suddenly stiffens. “I would’ve rather not knowing,” he cries and he hears Felix sob out before a comforting weight covers his back.

“This,” Minho clears his throat, his own eyes stinging with tears. “It doesn’t change anything. She is our daughter,” he cups his face between his hands, pressing a kiss to his shaking lips. “Our daughter. The daughter of your blood and of my heart, he will not take that from us, “

Jisung shakes before he throws himself at Minho, his arms tight around his shoulders. Felix pats his back softly, waiting for him to calm down.

“Maybe I should get a change of clothes for us both,” he says quietly but Jisung hears the huskiness to his voice, the telltale that he’s cried along with Jisung.

Felix is quick to come back, dressed in a simple black long sleeve shirt and black cargo pants pulled up above his waist, at an attempt to hide the tiny bump forming at the base of his abdomen. Jisung is given a matching set and as Felix goes to step away to give him some space, Jisung pulls him into a hug.

“I’m sorry,” he tells him in a snuffle.

“For what?” Felix’s voice cracks. “For everything,” Jisung says. He wants to tell him he’s sorry that he once didn’t understand his desire to have a child and how he was angry at his naivety. Jisung wants to apologise for everything he had ever done.

“Thank you for being my friend,” he sucks in a deep breath, his hand softly dragging across his abdomen. “I’m sorry I didn’t understand at first,”

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Felix pulls away from the hug and offers him his shirt. “I have never taken anything to heart because I know you love me like I love you,”

Jisung takes the shirt into his grasp and nods softly, wiping his tears away with his hand. Minho watches with the passings of a sorrowful smile.

“I’ll help you,” Minho takes the shirt from him and unbuttons the three buttons on each shoulder of the gown to slip him out. The medical gown pools around his bare hips and Felix bends down to his feet, putting socks on his feet. “Hey,” Jisung scolds softly. “Hush,” Felix tells him and Minho laughs quietly as he slips the shirt over Jisung’s head. “Is it too tight around your throat?” Minho asks, staring at the heightened collar of the black shirt. “No,” Jisung replies. “It feels a bit like... it’s protected now,”

“I shouldn’t have let you stay behind,” Felix mutters as he guides Jisung’s foot into his spare pair of boots. “And let you get hurt instead? No way, do you know how important oxygen is—“

“Jisungie,” Felix calls softly. “It’s okay,” he reminds him quietly.

“At least they let me keep my underwear,” Jisung sighs as he kicks the gown down to his feet. “Some type of dignity at least,”

“With what dignity we have left, yes,” Felix adds with a sigh.

“Is your ankle okay?” Minho asks after Felix has finished tying his laces. “It’s okay,” Jisung shrugs. “Could be better but it’s just a little tender. I’ll be okay,”

“Are you really not going to let me put my own pants on?” Jisung asks when Minho squats down, his pants in hand. “Nope,” He smiles softly at him before pulling at the elastic cuffs of the pants and stretching it over his boots. “Who puts shoes on before pants?” Minho huffs and Felix pouts.

Minho holds onto his hips, helping him stand quickly as he tugs his pants up. Jisung’s knees buckle at the sudden feeling to keep up his weight and quickly loses his footing and falls back onto the medical bed. “Whoa,” Minho says, his fingers slipping away from his waist as he sits next to him.

“I wasn’t expecting that,” Jisung admits softly. “Sorry,”

“It’s okay,” Felix tells him. “I think you’re just in shock, I don’t think you could have put your pants on without help,”

“How embarrassing,” Jisung flushes and Felix snorts. “I saw you give birth,” he reminds him. “What an ice-breaker,” Minho muses softly and Jisung whines, hiding his face in Minho’s shoulder.

“They’ve got him detained now,” Hyunjin puffs out when Jisung finally peaks up from Minho’s shoulder. Valkyrie is standing by him, her fists glistening with a sheen of blood. Her eyes are narrowed, in that look that resembles anger, but Jisung knows it to be fear.

“Valkyrie,” Jisung calls weakly. Minho slowly lets go of him, eases out of their embrace so Valkyrie can come closer. “Thank you,” he tells her. The woman’s bottom lip quivers, but her back then straightens and pulls herself back together, to that woman that is

strong, a warrior. There's a look in her eye, something that the men in the room miss, whether it be a woman's intuition or that Valkyrie was there first to save him, or because she saw it too in his face, but he knows Valkyrie understands the current cause of his turmoil without needing words.

"You will need not to think of him again," she tells him quietly, her dirtied hands clenching at her sides. "Never again," Jisung sends her back his own look and by the subtle nod of her head, he knows that Valkyrie has confirmed herself that Jisung's had understood the meaning behind her words.

As they tear their eyes away from each other, the commotion outside grows louder, filled with crashing and booming blasts that echo throughout the air.

Jisung rushes to his feet, forgetting his past incident with trying to support his own weight and he falls, his legs weak almost like a newborn fawn attempting to take its first steps. Minhو grabs his waist and hauls him back up, keeping an arm around his thin waist to keep him up.

He gives Minhو a sorry look and rolls his shoulders, peering out the ship's entryway to try to catch a glimpse of the commotion.

"It sounds like it's coming from the inner parts of the city," Hyunjin remarks as he peers over Jisung's head.

"Ready the ship," Minhو suddenly says, his face hardened, but his eyes shine with worry. "What is it?" Jisung asks him gently but

Minho only gives him a short look, before shaking his head. “I don’t know, but whatever it is, it can’t be good,”

The ship’s engine roars to life beneath their feet. The vibrations tingle up to Jisung’s spine and he reaches out for Minho’s hand just as Valkyrie comes and grabs it instead. Felix stands behind him, his hand pressing at his spine, probably to steady himself and allow him to give them both comfort.

As much as Jisung understands Felix’s decision is still coming and taking part in their plan that posed more harm to him than Jisung, he’s angry that he has put himself in this situation. But Felix was adamant that he had to do this, because he’s his best friend and he knows Jisung would do the same for him.

Sometimes Jisung wishes they could be selfish every now and then.

As soon as the inner circle of The Capital is in sight, Jisung’s breath catches in his throat at the sight.

Outside, the skyscrapers that house important government officials and others that held high positions in this society, there’s a blood bath.

The elite force of The Capital has captured a rescue ship.

The vessel is smoking as its crashed form lays broken against a smaller building that collapsed at the impact of the crash. Innocents

that filled the ship are pouring out, only to be held at the hands of the soldiers, some dead on impact and others held hostage.

Hyunjin yells to hover lower and ready the ladders, but Valkyrie suddenly leaps and grabs him, her eyes burning and her brows knitted together tightly. Her grip around his arm is tight and she pulls him back, shaking her head at him, telling him without speaking to call of his orders.

“Wait,” she hisses as Jisung and Minho step closer, peering closer at the scene. “Something is not right about this,” she mumbles. Felix and Jisung share a concerned look and when Jisung looks at Minho, he finds him pale and griefs-stricken.

“Minho?” Jisung squeezes his hand softly.

Before he can speak, ask him what’s wrong, a loud static noise fills their ears. Like nails running down a chalkboard, a high frequency buzz overwhelms them, rendering them suffering and clawing at their ears for relief.

As the noise disappears, light flashes across the largest building and within a second, the light changes to a face that Jisung will simply never forget. For all the wrong reasons.

Hyunjin’s knees buckle as his fathers face lights up the screen.

He wears a pristine suit, glass perched on the bridge of his nose as he

leans back in a comfortable chair. That twisted sinister look is on his face, the same look he gave Jisung as he ran his hand along his bare body. He shivers in Minho's hold.

"Well, if it isn't the traitors." He starts off, his voice carrying thought The Capital loudly.

"I must say, it was a very unlikely group to start this," he gestures the ruins around them. "A sorry excuse for a son," he spits out and Hyunjin clenches his fists, "his stupid friends and three boys that could carry a successful future... and Han Jisung," Felix's hold on his waist tightens as they all share looks as he's the only one named.

"You left, decided the luxury we gave you wasn't enough," his wicked smile shines through. "So why return to my glorious city? Why come back and cause havoc!" His voice heightens and his chest heaves with his poisonous words. "I give you two options and only two."

He leans closer to the camera recording him and whispers, "You can leave and hand over the traitors and those boys in the care of the esteemed doctors of The Capital... deliver my son and Han Jisung to me within an hour... or you can come closer,"

"There was a signal that my team found earlier," Minho suddenly spits out. "Fuck, fuck he's got a—"

"And suffer the consequences of the bombs I have ready! So what will it be? Hand over them or burn? Burn like the sun and breath in the debris, so what will it be, my son? Death or sacrifice?"

Notes for the Chapter:

The jilix.... One of my favourite things in this fic is their relationship especially in the first half when Jisung is learning to trust. Felix is so loveable but I really felt for him here too. And another bombshell ofc... honestly was debating whether to include Eunbyul's bio dad anywhere but i knew a few people were curious but hes probs dead now after Valkyrie and Odin have been on him :0

Also Jeongin... i will cry i just i cannot big mess IM A MESS

Anyways I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!!
Until next week!!

Pls come cry and yell with me!! [my twt!](#)

“He’s insane!” Hyunjin cries out as his fathers face flickers away after giving them an hour to make their decision and before the bombs hit.

“We can’t let him bomb the slums!” Felix cries out. “That’s where everyone is right now, looking after people and getting the rest of the citizens into ships! It won’t be clear for another three hours, Fern and the others simulated this!”

“Well we can’t just hand them both over!” Valkyrie yells out, her hands grabbing at her hair. “Hyunjin—“

“My team might not be able to break down the bombs signals, but if I can find the control plant then I can disarm them,” Minho yells over the commotion. His chest is heaving with heavy breaths.

“You could get yourself blown up!” Jisung cries. “That’s better than thousands getting blown up!” Minho counters and Jisung goes quiet, turning away from him as his bottom lip quivers. Minho sighs out and drops his chin to his shoulder, his arms wrapping around his waist.

“I’m sorry,” he apologises softly. “It’s the only thing I can think of to get us out of this,”

“I can’t believe you,” Jisung turns to him, eyes bleary. Minho looks at him with wide eyes. “I can’t believe you think you’re going alone,”

“Guys,” Changbin’s voice suddenly comes as his head pokes up above the ship’s entry. “A little help here?”

Hyunjin and Valkyrie lift him up and Jeongin and Seungmin after him.

“Did you hear?” Valkyrie asks them as Seungmin rushes to Jisung and Felix, wrapping them both in a crushing hug. “Oh thank god you both are okay,” he breathes out.

“Oh we heard,” Changbin confirms with a soft sigh. “We’re not giving you up!” Jeongin states loudly, pulling Jisung to his chest protectively and pointing at Hyun. Jisung settles against his younger friend, feeling him nose gently at his hair to comfort himself.

“No,” Minho agrees with Jeongin. “We are just getting a plan in motion,”

“Quite a dangerous one, must I say,” Hyunjin whispers.

“Now, when have our plans been safe?” Jeongin asks him and Valkyrie sighs with a nod. “We could use me as bait. Hyunjin doesn’t have to come with me,” Jisung whispers and Minho purses his lips, frowning deeply. Valkyrie slaps his shoulder and shakes her head. “Don’t be stupid you’ve sacrificed yourself enough today,”

“But—“

“Don’t even try,” Hyunjin says in a warning tone. Chan folds his arms over his chest and gives him one of those glares that has ‘try me’ all over it. Jisung decides to not cross that line.

“But we don’t know where the plant is,” Seungmin points out, his features strewn over his face with concern. “And time is quite valuable here,”

“We can make a wild guess,” Minho says through gritted teeth. “An educated guess, if you will,” he continues. “It has to be close, you saw that button on the back wall behind him?” Jisung hadn’t and from his friends reactions, they hadn’t either. “Typically it would be underground, or on a basement level, hidden and kept out of human prying and footfall,”

Jeongin scoffs this time. “Are you implying we’re to just casually walk in and find the entrance to this supposed power plant?” Minho tenses his jaw.

“No,” he answers. “That’s what the sewers are for,”

“Oh my god,” Felix whispers to himself but he cannot hide the horror in his eyes. Jisung gives him a sympathetic look.

“Rich people shit, too,” Jeongin replies with a started look. “I can’t say I’m not disgusted at the idea, but I must say it’s not a horrible idea,”

“I should’ve brought peppermint,” Valkyrie curses and Jisung suppresses a laugh at her disgruntled look.

“We can also try to use a detector, it might give us extra time to make sure I don’t blow us all up trying to dismantle it,” Minho grunts out as he peers down at the carnage below. “Huh,” Changbin chuckles nervously. “Probably a good idea...”

“Isa,” Minho calls through the communication device. “Minho,” she replies back after hearing his voice. “I trust you have a plan already?”

“Yes,” he breathes out. “We’re going to need a few things, though,”

—

Minho stands in front of the paint-peeling door and breathes heavily, his hand gripping the dinghy knob that opens too easily.

His childhood home hasn’t changed since they had the last meeting in his family room before breaking the boys out of the institution. His father had kept everything in its place, all the trinkets his mother used to make— a talent Minho supposes he got off of her and suddenly realising that makes him halt and suck in a deep breath.

Jisung places a hand on the base of his back, the comforting warmth makes him tear his eyes away and turn to his lover. “I grew up here,”

he says, suddenly forgetting what he was going to say before he turned and saw his eyes. There's a haze across his eyes, some type of foreboding grief. Minhø reaches for his hand just as his other friends pile in.

Chan notices the apprehension in Minhø's eyes and shoots him a smile from where he's stood across the room.

"We'll fix this," Minhø mutters, grazing his lips over his knuckles. "I do believe you," Jisung whispers back. "But I'm scared,"

Minhø's bottom lip quivers and he gives up, pulling him to his chest. "I'll protect you," Minhø tells him and the way Jisung's body moves in his arms tells him he's keeping his cries quiet as to not disturb their friends now searching the house for something Minhø made as a young teenager.

"But I want to protect you, too," Jisung tells him. "Keeping you safe protects my heart," Minhø says and tilts Jisung's head up with two fingers on his chin and swoops in for a swift kiss. "We can do this,"

Jisung gives him a solemn nod as Minhø takes his hand.

"I made this thing after I fixed that tv," he points to the ancient box on the left side of the wall and Jisung follows his eyes, his expression telling him that he's surprised. Probably that it actually worked despite its outside. And after all most of the technology Jisung has encountered was through Mydar and the other technologically developed settlements.

Quietly, their friends follow Minho.

“It must be in the trunk by our beds,” Chan speaks quietly as they enter a hallway.

The house is dark, made of varnished wood and an even darker stained wooden floor. There are multiple rugs along the ground, none of them particularly matching but it feels homey. Jisung can imagine a little Minho running in these halls, rushing to his parents after pulling up the rare larger than average crop. It eases the anxiety in his heart for a moment.

“I hope so...” Minho pauses and turns to Chan.

“No,” he sighs. “I made it for my father... if he used it often it would be in the greenhouse,”

“Oh great, a scavenger hunt,” Seungmin muses dryly and Felix hits his shoulder gently.

“We don’t have time,” Seungmin reminds them.

“Well the more we stand around here isn’t going to help this problem, now follow me,”

Minho leads them to a back door and points to the long structure mere meters away. “Let’s search different sections, the more looking in different places the faster we’ll find it,”

“It looks like a saw?” Jeongin questions with his brows knitted. “With an obnoxious circle blade attached to the handle instead of a long blade,” Chan quips and Minho gives him a glare before he opens the glass door, gesturing for everyone to go in.

The greenhouse stills houses many plants. There are tiny seedlings that his father must of planted recently, but there are much larger plants too which was unlike his father. Once a plant hit a certain growth range his father would be quick to transfer it to the fields where it would then takeoff and grow rapidly underneath the sun.

Minho finds his father’s favourite pair of gardening scissors, the bladed rusted and dull from overuse. There’s bags of potting mix made from the composting bin outside the kitchen and a scattering of fertilisers along the shelves where Minho would assume he’d find his creation that would be every helpful in what they’re about to throw themselves into.

“Ah!” Felix shouts and Jisung almost jumps out of his skin running to him. “A glorified pizza cutter!” He cheers merrily as he thrusts the tool in the air.

“Oh Felix!” Minho cheers. “I owe you one when we get back!”

“Don’t worry,” Felix gives him one of his bright smiles as he hands him the tool. “Jisungie is already on it,”

Minho raises a brow at his lover who flushes and whines at his best friend who only laughs in return.

“Well then we’ve got everything we need to go now,” Changbin rolls out his shoulders, turning to Chan. “I guess it’s time to either blow everything up or make your dad have a really really bad day,”

“I’m all for ruining his life, lets go,” Hyunjin replies with a certain furious tone to his voice.

The masks are tight around their faces and Jisung hopes it’ll be enough to hinder their smell. Felix is glued to Chan’s side, his eyes apprehensive as he locks eyes with Jisung.

Jisung understands him perfectly and he knows his friend well enough to know that not telling Chan is killing him. But he also understands that Felix’s values for this mission are at stake if he opens his mouth because as much as Jisung and he could fight against them, they both know they’re the only ones that truly know that his condition doesn’t jeopardise the mission. And they’re the only ones that would fight for him too come, the others too scared at the thought of anything bad happening to Felix.

Jisung fears that too, but he won't let him get hurt. He wouldn't before he found out, and even more now.

Isa appears at the end of the otherwise clear street they're standing on, a group of armoured warriors behind her. She looks tired, covered in dirt and other debris with the odd splatter of blood. Her eyes linger on Jisung, relief obvious in her gaze and Jisung finds a smile for her. The bomb squad follows closely behind her, with all the equipment needed to diffuse a bomb.

"We will begin to take the full ships back now," she tells them.

After President Hwang's announcement they had made the decision to evacuate the full ships to ensure their safety. The decision was risky in its own right. Shortening the medical team and some warriors was not ideal but they would come back as soon as the ships were emptied in Mydar.

Changbin bends down and with Chan's help they lift the sewers cap off and peer down into the dark abyss waiting for them.

The bomb squad doesn't waste any time and descends down into the sewers with ease.

"Be safe," she tells them quickly. More screaming is heard from the square. "We must go now," she tells them but she struggles to leave. "Please don't do anything reckless," She mutters before turning and running to the commotion.

“Well, you all heard the woman,” Minho claps Chan on the back. Felix slips his hand into Jisung’s and they take a deep breath.

“I’ll go down first,” Chan volunteers as he shines the torch light down through the rather small hole in the ground. “It’s a bit tight,” he grunts before suddenly slipping through.

“Chan!” Felix yells, his body thrusting forwards. “I’m okay! It’s not that far down,” he yells back up at them. Changbin goes next and Seungmin follows him quickly after. Jeongin peers at Valkyrie who seems hesitant to travel through the sewers without peppermint as she has expressed several times already.

“You coming in, rat girl?”

“I’ll kill you,” Valkyrie hisses at him and Jeongin raises his arms at her and Hyunjin rolls his eyes.

Valkyrie goes in before Jeongin and Hyunjin sighs as he hears them bicker below. “Gotta save Jeongin from my wife,” he waves at the three still standing above ground before he falls down with a thud followed by a shriek from Valkyrie.

“Go down and help us,” Jisung demands to Minho who manages a smile. “I was going to without you asking,” he says before he jumps down, landing with that scary catlike balance he has.

“Stay at the back with me. If anything happens I’ll protect you,”

Jisung tells Felix who smiles at him with his eyes. “I know,” he says back gently.

Felix sits and dangles his feet into the opening and slowly lowers himself, feeling arms wrap around his shins before he lets go of the rim and is lowered in slowly by Minho.

“God, we’re really about to do this,” Jisung says to himself, suddenly jittery with nerves.

He copies Felix’s descent and grips tightly onto Minho’s shoulders as soon as he lets go from the rim. Minho’s grip is tight around him even after his feet are planted on the concreted ground.

It’s dark and damp, Jisung first notices. With only the dim light from the torches each of them carry, it creates a creepy glow and Jisung is hyper aware about every sound, every movement.

The smell isn’t so pungent with the masks, but the air around him feels unclean and the limited light freaks him out a little bit. The path is only wide enough to fit two people next to each other and without thinking he links his arm with Felix’s while Minho fishes out the electronic sensor and turns it on, lifting it in the air and moving it slowly to hear where the beep was loudest. The beeps point them straight ahead and Jisung hopes it will be quick to find.

The bomb squad follows behind Minho’s tail and Felix and Jisung tag along at the back.

“You’re a bit jumpy,” Felix notes and Jisung scrunches his nose up at his friend. “I’m nervous,” he replies. “And I’m on alert to protect you,”

“Hey,” Felix whispers softly and Jisung meets his eyes, knowing he’s smiling under the mask he’s wearing. “It’s okay, I know you just want the best for me but I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t think it was worth risking my life,”

“Don’t say that,” Jisung scolds him gently. “No one is losing their life... and I know what it’s like to be pregnant and in scary situations, I just want the best for you,”

“And I’m thankful for that,” Felix rubs his back resting his head on his shoulder for a brief moment before the beeps from the device Minho holds suddenly erupts in a high pitched tone.

“Well,” Minho grunts as he turns the machine off. “I guess this is where we try to break in,”

Changbin passes the saw Minho made to one of the members of the bomb squad and then they all take several steps back, allowing the professionals to decide the safest way to cut through the concrete walls and hopefully into a basement that holds the room to defuse the bombs.

They knock on the walls first, listening for any echoes and after a while they pull out a power tool, drilling a hole to see if there’s

anything behind the wall.

A small beam of light shines into the sewers, a warm glow of orange that alerts them there's something nearby.

Chan and Minho are given a signal and together they make everyone else shuffle back ten paces for safe measure. Jisung clutches at Felix's hand even tighter and Felix responds by clasping on with his other hand.

The moment they begin to saw into the concrete wall, Jisung feels his stomach flip. In front of him, Seungmin checks his watch, hissing as he sees the time.

"What?" Jisung instantly asks. "We have thirty minutes left," he says through gritted teeth and Jisung feels light-headed all of sudden.

If these bombs go off it would be his fault. His fault for suggesting to come back here, for being so adamant he would burn them down.

He should've given himself as bait, to give them time.

When his breath becomes shortened and his vision begins to blur at the edges like it had hours prior when thick hands were wrapped around his throat, someone shakes his shoulders. He sees Felix's eyes teary as he shakes him, calling his name. Minho has forced himself through the crowd, his hand cupping Jisung's face gently, concern clear in his eyes.

“Hey hey,” he whispers softly. “We’re almost there, Ji,” Felix tells him. “Just a bit longer and we’ll make it up there in time,”

A sudden bang alerts their attention only to find a chunk of concrete crashing to the ground. A thumbs up from a bomb squad member tells them they’ve broken in successfully.

“This tiny tool is quite powerful,” one of them comments and Minho merely hums at the praise, his mind preoccupied with helping Jisung out of his panic and the next task at hand.

“We’ll go in first,” Chan speaks up for him. “There is bound to be guards somewhere and as efficient and professional you guys are, your forte is not in physical combat,”

“Protection would be appreciated,” They reply and with that Chan cocks his head and begins to walk towards the opening.

“Jisung,” Minho grabs him by the shoulders as the others begin their way to the opening. Chan stops them, not wanting to go in without them. It gives them time to comfort each other as well. Jisung sees Felix flop into Chan’s embrace.

“Do you know what I thought of you when I first saw you?” Jisung tilts his head to look at him, his eyes wide and slowly focusing. He shakes his head softly. “Probably that I was crazy,” he whispers with

a soft laugh.

Minho's eyes are strong, that unwavering gaze of a predator back in full swing. Jisung almost shivers. "No," he tells him. "I thought you were brave,"

Jisung blinks at him, surprised at the sudden confession. "And I watched you as we were on the run. When you were scared and angry, when you allowed Felix to get close... you were like an ember fighting amongst a pile of ashes and dying coals." Jisung feels his throat tighten at Minho's sudden confession.

"But you grew," Minho says in a whisper, a hushed tone meant only for his ears. "From an ember to a spark, to a flame gasping for oxygen to feed it, to a fire," Minho presses his forehead against Jisung's. He yearns to feel his skin beneath his fingers, like warm silk contorted around fine muscles. "When you walked out of that ship this morning, you were not just a fire that had fought to grow, but an inferno, you burn so bright you rival the sun. Don't let them forget that, Sungie. Let's go out in flames so everyone knows who you are, who we are."

Jisung blinks back his tears and with a nod of his head, strength comes back to him. "I can burn," Jisung mutters. "I'll burn brightly,"

"And I will be a wave," Minho finishes softly. "To cool you when you need it,"

Jisung slowly turns to their waiting friends. "We should go," he says quietly and with a step forwards Jisung feels his belly grow warm

with a newfound confidence. He is brave and he will burn to the ends of the sun.

The warm orange light casts over him and Minho feels his heart pound, in those eyes that had been unfocused and dim before that inferno he knew so well.

Chan is the first to enter. The gap is barely wide enough to fit him but he still enters with little struggle.

“Shit,” he hisses through his teeth. “Camera’s in corners,” he reports in a hushed voice. “Currently at what I think is a blind spot,”

“Can you shoot them?” Changbin asks, sliding closer to the entryway. “We should shoot them at the same time,” Seungmin says. “In case they react.”

“People will come down once they notice they are off,” Jeongin then points out.

“So we have ten minutes top,” Minho concludes through gritted teeth. He turns to the bomb squad. “Can you guys handle that?”

“I guess we’ll have to,” One of them says. “It’s not ideal and a time crunch causes stress, which causes—“

“Bad decisions,” Jeongin concludes for them.

“We’ll have your back for as long as you need, but we’re going to need to call for backup asap to give you more time and to allow us to get in.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Seungmin agrees before he calls in through the comms, ordering for several units to come down.

“Should we shoot now?” Chan asks but he’s met with a hasty no from both Jisung and Seungmin. “We need to wait for more backup to protect these guys,” Jisung explains, pointing the the bomb squad behind him.

“Right, do I stay here or?”

“Slowly come out,” Seungmin replies. “Really slowly,” he guides when Chan makes a subtle movement. Felix reaches for his bicep when his back comes into view, helping him over the ankle-high gap from the base of the ground.

“Twenty minutes,” Jeongin hisses at his watch just as the sudden shine of torchlight floods into vision.

Isa is running at the front, her hair wild around her face and her eyes set and narrowed as she storms ahead to them.

“We’ve got backup,” she announces and behind her is at least forty

units ready to protect the bomb squad and storm the President's tower from the inside.

"Boy do we ever," Jeongin cheers quietly.

"Changbin," Jisung calls. "You and Chan should shoot the cameras first, you both have the best shot here,"

"On it," He says and Chan enters again, slowly with Changbin by his side.

"You take this corner," Chan points to the right and then gestures to the left, "I'll take the left,"

The sound of shattering glass follows the sound of gunfire. "Clear," Changbin calls out, everybody in and get ready."

"We need units to stay down below and make sure the bomb squad gets their job done, once, and only one they've defused everything and made sure everything is disconnected, can some of you help them out and the rest are to follow to fight to the top, understood?" Jisung's voice booms throughout the tunnels as he stands tall and beside him Minho smiles beneath his mask, a glimmer in his eye.

"Well then, everyone tread carefully in here," Seungmin adds on quickly.

“Let’s go,” Jisung rolls out his shoulders. “We’ve got a government to take down,”

Notes for the Chapter:

Ngl totally forgot about this last night until I was just about to fall asleep lol

Im also so close to finishing the final chapters and I just... wanna cry :(((anyways hope you guys enjoyed!!

Please come talk to me on twt!! Idk how to make friends :((

[my twt!](#)

Jisung had never excelled in fighting. During training he did alright but he was never on par with his friends. Maybe he had too many distractions then, debating what strategies would work best, lead diplomatic discussions between settlement leaders all while raising his daughter.

But thrown admits in a battle, Jisung feels almost unstoppable.

As soon as they threw the door open, guards patrolling the entrance to the system control room are on high alert. Jisung and Felix had missed most of the first fights since they had put their plan to get caught rather early into the battles and when the first shot fires in their direction, Jisung steps in front of Felix, narrowly dodging the bullet. The armour they wear was said to be high quality and shock-absorbing, contented by Minho and Chan that Jisung and Felix learnt had been involved in a shoot out before.

The amount of people on their side quickly outnumber the guards at the basement level but Jisung knows there will be more and each time they ascend a level they'll be met with even more soldiers blocking their way.

It only takes a few minutes for the white soldiers in the basement level to be knocked out by the shock guns they're equipped with. Jisung's own is rested in his palm, his grip tight on it. He's not confident with his aim, but he supposes its better than having a baton to beat someone up with. Although, he and Felix might agree that the portable ultrasound machines make as their preferred weapon.

The stairs up to the ground floor are dark, but wide enough to fit ten people side by side. Jisung locks eyes with Minho who shoots him a sly smile, his mask off and somewhere littered on the floor. Jisung grips at the fabric and tears it off, shoving it in his pocket as he keeps eye-contact. Minho cocks his head to the stairs and with a silent nod, he and Felix rush up.

Chan is at the front with Changbin and Jeongin who are forcing the doors open by ramming into the locked doors. With a loud bang, Chan collides with the door in unison with. Jeongin and the doors creak open, the locks fatigued by the harsh collisions.

Bright light stings his eyes as soon as the doors open, but Jisung forces himself to blink, an attempt to adjust his eyes to the sudden light after being in a dimly lit area for an extended period of time. It was if they expected someone to be able to break into their electricity signals and to protect the elites of this society they ran one building off of its own signal. Or was it to hide the true weapons beneath its surface?

Jisung purses his lips and forces his eyes open and races up the last steps, entering the marble floored building.

When Jisung lived in The Capital, he had never seen the grandeur that the rich lived and breathed. He knew not having enough drinking water and eating cabbages for days on end, mud huts and the occasional wooden floor. While he had lived like that along with thousands and thousands in the same situation the few wealthy officials and lucky families lived in ignorance. In tall buildings with views of the parks in the city, with heating in the long winters and cooling systems when the weather peaked in summer.

Buildings with golden chandeliers, marble floors and walls lined with screens that play videos of scenes outside. Jisung sees the burning ship outside the building, the few that weren't saved still laying in the debris.

"Call for everyone to come in," Jisung says, pressing his fingers to his comms. Felix and Seungmin look at him with their eyebrows raised. "Good call," Isa calls back to him.

"This is it," Jisung tells his two friends. He reaches out squeeze their hands. "The last stand is here."

"I suppose it is," Seungmin answers back airily, his eyes locked on the sudden entrance of an army of white soldiers.

"I love you guys," Felix suddenly says. "I just... I just want you all to know that. Let's be strong," Jisung gives his hand a squeeze. "I love you, too," he whispers and with a smile he lets go of his soft hand, his grip around his gun tight.

The screen in front of them flickers from the scene outside to the familiar face of President Hwang.

"I see you both," he starts off and Jisung swears he stares at him through the screen. He lifts his watch to his face and hums. "There's ten minutes left on the clock," his voice is mocking and Jisung wishes he could punch him. Suddenly, there's a large hand on his shoulder and he flinches but when he looks up he breathes a sigh of relief. Odin is towering over him at his side, his battle axe slung over one shoulder.

“I was thinking I could introduce myself as his sons father-in-law by swinging my axe through his skull?” He says coldly. “He will not touch you both, Jisung. You all have been through enough already,”

Jisung doesn't doubt Odin's words, he knows if the man gets close enough he'll take the opportunity to kill him there and there. Jisung doesn't know how he feels about it, but he thinks he won't be remorseful about his death.

“I will wait for the full ten minutes. If I do not see your faces by then... well I think you understand the gravity of your situation well enough. Be my guests, choose your fate,” he spreads his arms out before the video cuts off.

“What a fucking maniac,” he hears Hyunjin spit nearby.

“Minho,” Jisung calls through the comms after flicking the switch on for the team only channel. “Can you see any elevators nearby? There's several in the hall way where the guards are but if theres anymore we need to get in with at least another team of backup and wait for the rest of them to fight their way up,”

“Right,” Minho's voice sounds slightly pitched in the comms. “Since I haven't got the clear for the defusing we need to get up quick.”

“I can see some,” Changbin's voice comes through. “To your left, Jisungie, the wall that protrudes there are four lifts there, all unguarded.

“Okay,” Jisung breathes out. He switches the team only off and lets them listen to their plan, asking for them to cover them as they and special weapons unit 2 and 3 come with them.

“One,” Jisung feels his stomach flip. If they don’t get to the lifts in time, caught by white soldiers or if more come down in them, they’ll run out of time. Slowly, the crowd their hidden in moves to allow them to group up. the hand that slips into his free one is Felix’s, but Minho and Chan make their way over to them successfully. Changbin is in front of them, going to lead them to the lifts and Hyunjin and Valkyrie have just made it. “Two,” everyone stills, their breath catching in anticipation. “Three!”

They bolt forwards and as soon as they move, guns are pointed. The group moves with them, acting like a shield, blocking them around the lifts. Hyunjin leaps and slams his fist against the up button on the first lift while Changbin, Jeongin and Chan take the other three. As soon as Hyunjin hits the button, the doors open and he and Jisung are thrown in without a warning.

Odin squishes himself in with eight more people. Jisung can barely breathe presses up against the wall at the very back. Hyunjin slips his hand into Jisung’s hand, pulling him closer to his body in an attempt to save him from being accidentally crushed. Someone at the front slams their fist on the button to the top, where the Presidents office is and Jisung holds his breath when the elevator rumbles to life and shoots up. His stomach feels as if it’s in knots and he hopes that the bomb squad with succeed soon because he’s not confident that the President will not send the bombs if they appear in front of him. He’s not a very trustworthy man.

Jisung takes a deep breath when the elevator stutters to a halt. Odin's muscles tense in front of him, his axe gripped tightly in his hand, ready to protect the people that had become family to him and his daughter.

The doors open and bright light fills his vision, reflecting off white marble walls. White guards are situated out the front, blocking the entrances.

"Hand them over," one demands and Jisung sees how Odin tenses, ready to leap at them. He reaches out to touch his bicep, shaking his head. The man's eyes soften at him, his lips pursing as he nods in response, slowly shifting his body to allow them both to exit.

As soon as he and Hyunjin are within reaching distance, they're grabbed and dragged away from the elevators.

Jisung almost trips, his ankle suddenly flaring in pain he had forgotten about during the rush of adrenaline, but now it throbs and he winces as he has to sprint along as he's dragged away. The curl of the fingers around his bicep is tight, enough to know it'll leave a wake of purple across his skin after this.

Hyunjin keeps up better with the guards and when Jisung hears the telltale of elevator doors opening, he finds Minho and Chan storming ahead, easily taking over Odin and the rest of the crew that shared the same elevator as them. Valkyrie, Felix and Changbin are next to reach the top, scurrying when the scene fills their vision. Jeongin and Seungmin are the last to arrive on the floor, Isa in front of them, her eyes wild as she looks around.

There's a large archway ahead, plastered with carved gold and a sign perched at the top. Jisung doesn't have enough time to read it, but he knows what it is. The entrance to the president's office.

The whole place is heavily guarded, guns cocked and ready to shoot at them if they make a wrong move.

They're pushed through barely open frosted glass doors and suddenly, Jisung is flung to the floor, collapsing in a heap as the wind stutters out of his lungs at the force. He feels as if invisible hands are wrapped around his throat, squeezing his airways tightly shut. He grips at his throat, wheezing as Hyunjin is pulled further in.

Jisung's breathing is heaved and wheezed as he lifts his head from his place on the floor. He barely registers the hands at his back, warm and comforting and not like the armoured finger guards of the white soldiers.

There's a single step upwards at the end of the room, a large desk made from glistening white stone lays in the middle of the podium and the man sitting behind the desk gives Jisung a devilish smile.

"With minutes to spare," he says. The grit of his voice feels like a dull blade cutting through his skin. He remembers all the things he ever said to him, how he looked at him and how he touched him.

Jisung coughs, air still hard to breathe into his lungs. He knows he looks pathetic like this in his eyes, pushed to the ground before him and unable to breathe properly. Jisung sees Hyunjin dragged to the step before his father, shaking like a leaf.

President Hwang's eyes finally find his sons. "You of all people I did not expect to betray me like this. Look at what you could of had if you stayed behind?" He gestures to the various expensive items around him and points to himself. "You could of had it all, my son," his tone is ice cold and Jisung sees Hyunjin's fist clench by his sides.

Jisung tries to stand up, to get to Hyunjin's side but a foot comes down harshly on his back, pressing him into the ground. His head bounces against the floor hard and his vision blurs at the edges. There's a sudden gasp that sounds like Felix but he's pushed away, falling back into Chan's arms.

The rest of their friends and the troops are stuck in the doorway. The white soldiers have blocked the exits with their bodies, a clear message that means to stay behind and watch. To not dare to fire in here otherwise the consequences will be dire.

Jisung slowly puts his arms out to lift his upper body off the ground and lifts his head.

The president locks eyes with him and smiles nefariously. Jisung's gaze is unrelenting, his eyes burning as he keeps the eye contact up. He has the audacity to look amused.

"You do not look like the same boy I once knew, hmm?" He stands from his desk and creeps around to the front. "Where did he go?" He laughs out as he steps down to the same level as Jisung. "I worked so hard on you, made you the perfect candidate of the program," he stands in front of him, looking down at him. Jisung hears a sudden commotion behind them, but it's gone as quickly as it appears.

“Did you pass your last test?” He suddenly grips onto his chin, lifting his face closer to him. Jisung hisses out, his neck craning painfully. “Do you remember what I said we’d do if you passed?” He says it in a low whisper. Then, he suddenly grips his shoulders and tugs him upright. He leans closer to him, one hand closely coming to grip at his waist. “I can see it,” He whispers into his ear. “In your hips,” disgust coils hot and deep in Jisung. He wants the thrash out of his grip, to knock him out but if he makes one wrong move, his man still has the power to blow the slums and lower class city to bits.

Until he gets the signal he will be strong.

“So where’s that baby?”

“You will never know,” Jisung spits out and the man laughs under his breath. “If you lose here today I will find them, and when you lose you know where you’re going to go?”

“Stop playing,” Jisung tells him. “Most of your ‘candidates’ are either in the field dead or unconscious and others are right here, right?” Jisung laughs darkly. “But we will not be the ones to lose this.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure,” The president breathes in a hushed tone. “I can say one word and they will listen. I can command them to take you away now if I so wished, but I’d rather a show later,”

“You are a sick bastard,” Jisung spits at him.

“Perhaps I am, Han Jisung. Perhaps for you I will do wild things,” and with those words that knot into Jisung’s stomach like a pit of nausea, he steps back up the podium to his desk.

“Hyunjin is my only heir,” the president says as he sits himself down in the plush black chair. “Do not cause harm to him,”

“Oh, I am not your fucking son,” Hyunjin spits at him and the mans eyebrows raise. “Do not push it,” he growls. “I haven’t forgotten you are a traitor just yet,” he warns.

“You think your team is so smart,” the president coos, his eyes narrowing at the sight of the people stuck in the doorway still.

“You think we won’t use the same things you do to us?” President Hwang breaks out into a laugh, looking straight at Jisung. He presses something on his desk and panic flares up in Jisung, like molten metal burning through his body. But instead of letting the bombs off, the screen behind him suddenly lights up. But what’s on it makes Jisung stomach drop, his heart burst and this intense desire to hurt the president overwhelms his system.

There is a collage of pictures of security camera footage across the screen.

Theres a photo of them in an elevator, Minho and Chan out the front while the inside of the elevator hold Jisung in Jeongin’s lap, blood seeping into his clothes as his face is contorted into a scream. A

photo of him holding Eunbyul as he watches them train in the barracks in Mydar. One of him carrying his daughter as they board a ship. Fern and Isa playing with Eunbyul, and the last one a photo of Fern and Eunbyul together. The baby girl in her grandmothers arms, crying. A photo that was recently taken.

“If only we had realised we could do this before... we would’ve had you all back here and you would’ve given birth in our facilities and not some filthy elevator,”

“But alas, there’s a baby girl,” the president coos and Jisung moves without thinking.

He moves too quickly for the guards to react and before he knows it, he’s jumping through the air, landing on the desk in front of him and his hands locking around the presidents throat.

Minho roars as soon as Jisung moves, firing his gun at the white soldiers blocking their entry. Odin gets through, rushing to Hyunjin’s side and knocking out the two guards keeping him hostage.

The president punches back, griping Jisung by his throat as well and he suddenly stands, giving him the upper hand and smashes his back down on the desk. Jisung feels all the air leave him, his spine feeling as if it’ll snap if anymore pressure is pressed against it.

A flash of white blonde hair and then Valkyrie is on the president, clawing at his face which coerces him to let go of Jisung’s throat.

“Bitch!” The president screams, throwing Valkyrie off of him but she lands easily and reaches out for Jisung. “Who the fuck are you!” Valkyrie pushes Jisung out of the way when a white solidier comes by ready to punch him and instead Valkyrie gets him to the ground, a knee between their shoulder blades to keep them down.

“That’s my wife!” Hyunjin yells, a gun cocked and aimed at his father. His fathers eyes darken, looking between the fierce woman that slowly back away to guard her husband and to his son. “Ha, you,” he looks at them wide eyed as if he can’t believe it.

Suddenly, another guard grabs Jisung by the waist and hauls him up over their shoulder. “Boss,” he speaks to the president. Jisung tries to escape from his grip but with the helmet he’s wearing he can’t get a grip of anything that’d make him let go. And from up here he can’t quite reach his groin. The president cocks his head, gesturing to his desk.

“Put the gun down, Hyunjin, we both know it’s not loaded,”

Hyunjin visibly hesitates. The gun isn’t loaded and Hyunjin had already claimed he wasn’t low enough to kill him even though all the evil he has done. Hyunjin just couldn’t do it.

The guard manhandling Jisung swipes an arm over the desk, clearing it off trinkets and far too expensive pens and then slams him down. He lets out a scream when the guards hands grip at his thighs. A scream tears through his lips, but before his hands can move, a looming shadow appears over them and Odin punches the guard in the face. The mask he wears cracks at the force and he goes down, limp.

Odin helps Jisung up and they scramble down the stairs together, crowding around Hyunjin and Valkyrie. Jisung suddenly feels hands on him and finds Felix behind him, tears in his eyes. "That was so scary!" He yells, wrapping him in a swift hug. Minho's hand lands on his shoulder and he hears Jeongin fighting behind him.

The president sits back at his desk, his hair a mess and his suit crinkled and scratches down his throat that have gone deep enough to penetrate through his skin and leave blood dripping down his neck and into his white dress shirt. Silently, he raises a single hand up and suddenly all the guards stop moving.

"Bring them out," he calls out, looking rather bored more than anything. It makes Jisung feel sick. His heart is hammering in his chest and bile threatens to crawl up his throat.

Three people are brought out through a door hidden on the left facing wall near the presidents desk. The first is a woman that walks with a large limp and Seungmin makes a choked noise. "My mother," he cries softly and Jisung reaches for his hand, squeezing. There's a guard pushing her behind the president, a gun cocked to her head. The next is another woman, dressed in a pristine pale pink set and Jisung sees the familiar features she shares with her son. Hyunjin straightens at the sight of his mother, and unlike Seungmin's mother and the other person being pushed out, there is no gun to her head but she looks horrified.

She spots Hyunjin in the crowd and her knees buckle, her face crashing and tears pour down her face.

Jisung vaguely notices the last person, an older man and his heart sinks at the whimper that comes from Minho. The man has a frown on his face, but his eyes are scared as he scans the crowd, stopping when he sees his son looking at him with terror in his eyes.

“I could have trapped these people long ago,” the president claims with a yawn and Jisung knows this is true. He could’ve. “I could have killed them already,” he shrugs his shoulders nonchalantly.

“But where’s the fun in that when I can use them to control you?”

Jisung reaches for Minho’s hand with his free hand. Minho squeezes his hand and he suddenly stills, a frown etching on his face before it clears and he turns to Jisung, breaking eye contact with his dad. Jisung gives him a knowing look and Minho gives him a soft nod in response.

Jisung knows what that means. The bomb squad had finally done their job and defused the bombs that were controlling this situation. But now there’s a new variable. Two lives. The lives of his friend’s mother and his lover’s father.

Slowly, Jisung lets go of his friend’s hands and makes his way to Valkyrie.

“Valkyrie,” he whispers under his breath. She doesn’t turn to him, covering up the fact that Jisung is talking to her, but Jisung knows she’s listening. “It’s done,” he whispers. “If they make a move to shoot you go for Seungmin’s mother, I’ll go to Minho’s dad,” he mutters and she gives him a softly spoken yes in return.

“What a foolish idea you lot came up with,” the president mutters, pressing at his temples as if he has a headache. “Breaking out and coming back?”

“I was going to let you go until we expanded further. I would’ve found you all myself but instead... you’ve done it for me,”

“Be quiet,” Hyunjin spits at him. “Do not act a fool and as if we don’t what you have truly done,”

“Oh,” he raises an eyebrow. “And what would that be?”

“Where should we start?” He grits out. “The making of the deadly disease that you made?” The president’s lips twitch in amusement. “I always knew you were smart, Hyunjin. But how long did it take for you to realise that?”

“You are a sorry excuse for a human,” Hyunjin tells him. “You’ve done things to others that are downright evil,”

“Only if you look at it that way,” he replies and he shows his deluded mind clearly.

“And how many of you knew?” Hyunjin turns to look at the few socialites huddled in a corner covered with guards. “Did you all know his secrets? Did you know that he made the disease and spread it?”

Did you know what he did to the boys in the institution? Did you all know!?” He roars.

“Of course they did, Hyunjin,” his father grits out. “Who do you think helped fund these projects? They’ve been on my side since the start,”

“Then I suppose we shall treat them the same as you,” Hyunjin concludes in a rasp. “Like rats,”

His father grits his teeth as he stands, his hands slamming on the ruined desk before him.

Suddenly the door on the side swings open and an alarmed guard without his helmet rushes out. “Sir! The power signal is down! The bombs are down and we’ve received word they’ve been diffused!”

Jisung doesn’t miss the suddenly tense look to him, nor the relief in the others around him.

“Well then,” he looks Hyunjin in the eye. “Shoot them all,”

Jisung flies through the air, leaping up the single step and crashes into Minho’s father, throwing him out of harms way just as Valkyrie does the same the Seungmin’s mother. She twirls her around and pushes her towards her father who catches the woman in his arms.

Without warning or any planning ahead, two Sivran soldiers release

their golden lassos and catch both the guards that were ready to shoot around their ankles and lank on the golden lines. They crash to the ground and are dragged through the crowd.

Jisung can barely keep up with what's happening. White soldiers are flying everywhere, some lying unresponsive and others are in heated fights with their troops. Some, to Jisung's absolute surprise are standing around the president with their guns situated on him.

The president has a wild look in his eye, a certain deranged vibe and Hyunjin suddenly leaps up the stairs just as he turns to his wife and Hyunjin's mother and holds her against him like a human shield.

Hyunjin tries to grab his mother, but the presidents grip is tight on her and he's unrelenting. His fingernails dig into her skin and his mother cries out in fear, trying to free herself. Hyunjin can't get a clean hit on him without hurting his mother and although she might not be innocent in all of this either, Hyunjin can't let her get hurt. And Hyunjin has a suspicion that his mother was just as in the dark as he was.

Valkyrie then appears by his side and gives him a nod before she lands a hit to the side of his head with her foot. It knocks him off balance and gives Hyunjin just enough time to grab his mother and hand her off to troops that are guarding Seungmin's mother and Minho's father.

Valkyrie kicks him in the gut and grips him by his hair when he goes down. Odin takes over and drags him to the front of the desk, baring his throat and pressing the sharp, clean blade of his axe to his throat.

“Stop!” He roars above all the noise in the hall and within a few seconds people have stopped to turn, weapons still raised and pointed at the enemy, but listening.

Jisung’s head is spinning when he stands to his feet. He slowly limps towards Odin, his ankle throbbing and aching.

“We can offer you a choice,” he begins. His voice is stronger than he expected it to be, but there’s still a certain wheeze and it’s harder to breathe than he normally remembers it to be. His body tenses when he sees a guard point his gun to him, his finger hovering over the trigger. The armour he wears only protects his middle and the thought sends red hot fear shooting up his spine.

“You can either live this through and live a life of horror,” he gulps. “Or you can start fresh, a blank slate where things will be accessible to you. Therapy services, a career agency to get you back up on your own feet. You can live safely with your families, so please, think this through. Do you want to stay here in a burning pile of rubble and what is left of a corrupt nation or do you want freedom?”

The crowd is quiet for some time and even the president doesn’t dare to run his mouth with Odin’s axe right at his throat.

But not everyone is pleased by what Jisung has to say. The guard shakes as he takes a single step towards Jisung and in a flash, someone is leaping over, covering his body with their own as a loud bang fills the room.

The person falls against Jisung with a puff of air and Jisung watches

with wide eyes as a lasso grips around the guards waist and drags him to the ground before being shot with a shock gun.

Jisung tries to pull the person up, but they're heavier than he expected and he almost falls at the extra weight. The person slowly lifts himself away, smiling softly at Jisung.

"They didn't have a very good aim," His father whispers and Jisung blanches at the sight of him. "How did you get here? You're supposed to be taking care of Jaein," he hisses. Jisung frowns and looks over the man. "You didn't get shot?"

"I told you he had a bad aim," he repeats.

Jisung slowly turns to the president, giving him a glare before he looks up at Odin. "Do what you must, but keep him alive. The leader committee wish to interrogate him further,"

"Of course we do," Odin replies and knocks the hilt of his axe handle onto President Hwang's head who drops like a feather.

And around the room some of the white soldiers remove their helmets and lay their weapons down.

Jisung takes a step down and his knees buckle and then he falls, his vision blurred and his breathing noisy in his ears.

We did it. He thinks. We've done it.

Notes for the Chapter:

Once again i have no beta... uhh so sorry about typos and such!!! Also big news i finished writing this fic today... im so sorry it took so long but I did it!!!

There may be other... overmorrow related things coming so keep an eye out in the next end notes of the next chapters to find out more!! Love u alllllll!!!!!!

Pls come interact with me im lonely and sometimes i post wips and stuff!! [my twt!](#)

Jisung's fingers feel numb.

On the cold ground he tries to breathe, but there's a dull pain in his chest every time he tries to take in air. His body feels like it's submerged in quicksand and each movement pulls at him and leaves him dizzy than the last.

"Jisung, Sung, hey," A hand on his waist shocks him but then the familiar scent of petrichor hits his nose and Jisung feels like they're on the run again, cuddled in Chan's arms as he tries to sleep. Felix's soft hands are on his shoulders, attempting to massage him but Jisung flinches at each kneed to his muscles, too sensitive for such things at the moment.

"Let me help you up, huh?" Chan offers him a hand and Jisung pauses, looking up into his wide brown eyes. "I'm tired," he whispers and he feels tears brim in his eyes. "Oh, Chan I'm so tired," he collapses against him, the same tired boy he once was confiding in the man that was effortlessly comforting and smelt like home from the very start.

"You've done so well, Sungie," Felix praises him softly, draping himself gently across his back. Jisung's crying is hushed, accompanied with wheezing that alarms Chan. "Hey, hey breathe, Ji, come on,"

"Can't," he responds when Chan pulls him away from the hug. "Can't breathe well," he continues and Chan looks at Felix with worried eyes.

“Come on,” Chan speaks softly, the same tone he once used when ushering him out of the countless nightmares he was plagued with. Faintly, in the back of his mind Jisung wonders if he’ll have nightmares of this day? Probably.

Chan grips him beneath his armpits and slowly drags him from the ground and he allows him to lean against him as he heaves in air, scanning the room.

The white soldiers that had refused to surrender are all being detained and would soon be arrested with the president and his rich buddies that fuelled his Inhumane projects.

Jisung slowly lifts himself off from Chan, his fingers gripping at the material of his pants when he sees Minho across the room, his father tucked tightly in his arms as they cry together, constantly looking over each other. Jisung’s own father stares at him from a distance, a glister to his eyes as he watches his son. There’s pride in his eyes, but theres the lingering pain inside him. The hatred he now has for himself for doing what he did do his son.

The thunderous sound of a fleet of ship engines fill his ears before they stop suddenly. They’ve perched on the top of the large building, already beginning to fill them up with the arrested soldiers and their many troops.

Felix’s hand on his back is persistent even as Isa suddenly swipes in and pulls him into her arms. “You’ve done it,” she whispers. “Look, Jisung,” She looks into his glazed dark brown eyes and cups his full cheeks in her hands. “From a hope to a reality,” she whispers, the

corners of her mouth tugging up. “Now who is going to write you down in history books?”

Jisung’s bottom lip is tugged between his teeth as he tries to keep his composure. “It’s over now?” He says like these past few days were a haze. Isa only nods softly, patting his cheek softly before she saunters away and helps drag the unconscious president away.

“Sungie,” Felix says from behind him and Jisung turns and tucks him into his arms. “You should go and get in the ship,” Jisung tells him. “Please rest now,” Felix’s eyes soften and he gazes over at Chan who is staring down at the two with such obvious adoration it fills Jisung’s heart with warmth. “Once you get back,” Jisung tells him quietly. “Make sure you tell him,” Felix smiles wide and gives him a nod before reaching out for Chan’s hand. “Will you be okay?”

Jisung nods softly. “Please,” he tells him. “Don’t make me worry even more about you, Lix,”

“You should come back quickly, too,” Chan tells him, worry still piercing through his gaze. Jisung gives him a soft nod. “I won’t be far behind,” he mutters. “I want to get back quickly,”

The warmth from Felix’s hand suddenly disappears and his body feels heavy again, like his lungs are weights inside his chest and they’re pulling him down. He takes a few seconds to try to gain strength in his weak and wobbly knees and to slowly lift off his sore ankle, putting most of his weight on his good ankle.

He locks eyes with Minho when he looks up. His hand is tucked

tightly in his fathers, standing close to him with a proud smile on his face, but his eyes are soft and warm and they feel like a blanket from all the bitter air he suddenly feels around him. His face must show how tired he feels because theres a sudden flash of worry over his face before he leads his father down the podium to where Jisung is standing.

His steps are strong as he strides over to Jisung and the younger feels his heart tremble, his knees back to wobbling as he stands in front of him.

His hand cups the back of his head, his broad palm cradling his skull as he leans down and captures his lips with his own. Jisung feels like he's kissing him for the first time all over again. The air in his lungs is knocked out of him. He lets himself lean against Minho, confident that he'd be able to keep him upright without using much strength. He does, and his hands grip at his waist as they pull apart.

"Dad," He smiles wide at Jisung, his happiness penetrating into Jisung. "This is Han Jisung,"

Jisung looks over to the man next to Minho who looks a little surprised at the sudden kiss between him and his son, but soon enough his eyes are teary and a smile breaks across his sun-worn face.

"So it is you," he says, his voice tilted with a sense of awe. "The one that changed everything,"

Jisung lets out a surprised squeak when he's ripped off of Minho and

thrown into his arms. His hug is tight, as if he hasn't been able to hug anyone in quite some time and the thought makes tears prick at his eyes. Minho lets out a soft laugh behind him, rubbing gently at Jisung's back.

"Sorry I didn't tell you, dad. I was a bit distracted and didn't tell you who Jisung is to me," Minho's dad pulls away and looks at Jisung's face before looking at his son. "You've done well, look at how handsome he is,"

"I know," Minho laughs as Jisung's finally released from his hold. "But if you will come back with us there's... something special waiting for you," Minho meets his eyes and Jisung smiles softly. His father gaining a granddaughter after allowing his son to participate in a life endangering break out isn't something he's probably expecting but Jisung has learnt over the past year that sometimes these surprises are the best life has to offer.

"Oh!" His eyes light up and he smiles, reaching for his sons hands. "There is nothing left here for me or anyone else... if you'd both so allow it, I'd like to live close with you once again."

"Of course," Jisung whispers softly. "You are family,"

"We should board a ship now, we've been on the frontlines for too long," Minho comments and gestures to the open doors where he was stuck not too long ago. Jisung's own father suddenly appears beside Jisung, his apprehension clear in his eyes and the way his mouth is open but he fails to speak.

“What is it this time?” Jisung has little patience for time but he supposes he should give him a chance after he almost took a bullet for him.

“Are you okay?” He asks him quietly and Jisung pauses. His fathers eyes scan him up and down. “You look—“

“I’m fine,” he tells him harshly. “I’m just tired. You should go too. Did you even tell Jaein you were leaving? Who did you leave her with?”

“She demanded to be taken to Eunbyul,” he replies softly and Jisung gulps. “So she’s with Fern,” Jisung concludes. “I guess you’re right,” his father mutters. “I’ll go... and again, Jisung, I really am sorry,”

“You’ve said that before,” Jisung tells him. “But it doesn’t ease the pain,”

“Right,” he replies and the turns on his feet without another word, walking away.

“Sorry,” Jisung apologies, but he can’t quite meet Minhoo’s fathers eyes after that. “My father,” he tries to say and when he finally looks up, tears fall down his cheeks. Minhoo clutches on his hand, squeezing his palm comfortingly. “We don’t get along,”

“It seems he wishes to,” Minhoo’s father comments without judgement but even Minhoo winces and he notices. “It won’t happen,” Jisung

replies quietly as if he's ashamed. In a way he is. He won't get over it and he won't be able to look at his father again without feeling panic and hatred but Jisung is grieving the loss of a father still.

"Probably not a good time to get into the gritty details," Minho comments and tugs his father forwards. "Let's make our way home, yeah?"

"I miss her," he mutters beneath his breath. All he wants to hold his baby close and feel her loving cuddles. He wants to fall asleep with his nose in her soft curls that smell like lavender, courtesy of the lavender scented shampoo and bubble bath Minho continues to bring back, claiming that it just suited her.

"Come on," Minho pulls him gently along but after a few steps his hand slips away to lead his father down the pathway.

Jisung presses a hand to his chest, feeling the rumble in his chest as he breathes in. The wheeze is consistent and each step he takes he tries to be strong but his ankle throbs so hard that the ache travels up his leg and he grits his teeth to keep his whimpers down.

But he feels like the world around him is underwater. The noise of people's voices mixing together drowns out to a faint background noise, but the sounds of his breathing is loud in his ears, his heartbeat thunderous in his ears, his fingertips throbbing.

His next step is shaky, but he catches himself and Minho must hear him, either the way his next breath gets stuck in his throat or the way he had stumbled. He says something to him, his mouth clearly

moving, a frown marring his face but Jisung doesn't hear anything. His vision is blurring at the corners and he gulps, trying once more to breathe but pain erupts in his chest.

Minho's eyes suddenly go wide and it's almost like slow motion with the way as soon as he breaks out in a run towards him Jisung's vision completely blurs over and before he knows it, the world is tumbling down, taking him down with it.

His body crashes to the ground mere moments before Minho can catch him.

—

When Minho turns after hearing a loud wheeze, he's not expecting to see Jisung several paces away, looking dazed as he struggles to step closer to him. His eyes are distant and worry sinks into Minho.

"Jisung? Baby? Are you okay?" And when he doesn't respond, panic fills him. He begins to fall then, his eyes struggling to focus and when they begin to roll back into his skull, Minho sets out in a run but he trips over something on the red carpet beneath him and he falls quickly, like a crumbling building and he hits the ground with a sickening thud.

"Oh fuck!" Minho hisses out, scrambling to reach him.

His father hurries after him, placing a hand on his shoulder as Minho gathers his unconscious lover into his arms. The stickiness of blood coats his hand that tucked near his hip and Minho curses when he finds someone's rouge dagger covered in blood and a rip in the fabric of Jisung's pants. He presses a hand against the wound, unsure how deep it is, but he hopes the fabric had taken most of the damage, but the fall was hard and Minho knows he needs to find Hyunjin quickly.

"Hyunjin," he calls through his comms, holding Jisung up with one hand as he connects to their team only channel. "What's up?" Hyunjin calls back quickly and Minho lets out a relieved breath. "Jisung. He's not doing well, wheezing and he just fainted on me, but he must've fallen on someone's blade because he's bleeding,"

"Is it a lot of blood?" Hyunjin questions him quickly. Minho dares to take his hand off of the wound and sighs in relief when it looks like only a minor cut. "No, thank god. I panicked when I saw blood," Perhaps it was because of their last experience with Jisung bleeding profusely that had triggered his response, but Minho is glad that it's not as bad as his mind was convinced it was mere seconds ago.

"There's a ship up here, everyone else is on it, including the boys Jisung and Felix saved with Changbin and his crew. If you can carry him up here I'll look at him right away,"

"Do you think he's very hurt?" Minho whispers and he hears Hyunjin sigh. "He's tough," Hyunjin comments. "But it is worrying." He concludes gently.

"We'll be right up," Minho then stands, tucking the younger to his

chest and gives his dad a sorry look. His father looks shocked out of his mind and Minhó wants to sit him down quickly before he passes out on him too.

“Is he okay? Who were you talking to?” His father shoots at him as they begin to walk out of the room once more. “Hyunjin,” Minhó tells him hurriedly as they finally exit through the doors and past the archway. Minhó notices the fire escape door across of them is currently empty and he guides his dad over to it in a rush. “I hope he’ll be fine,”

“He must be a strong man,” his father comments and Minhó lets out a soft grunt as they begin to climb the flight of stairs up to the rooftop. “He is.” Minhó confirms. “He’s been through a lot,”

“As have you, my dear son,” his father reminds him. “You risked your life for him and his friends,” he whispers just as Minhó can see the sky.

The hues of pink and purple painting the large expanse of sky tell Minhó is nearing night fast. They had started before dawn and had come out victorious at dusk. Minhó himself is exhausted, but the person in his arms outweighs his physical worries.

“It was worth it,” Minhó whispers back softly. His life without Jisung feels like it had been far away, a distant memory where living with Jisung, breathing the same air and kissing his soft lips, the feel of his skin beneath his fingers, the soft sounds he swallows when he rocks into him— it feels like a dream. A never ending dream that he’ll live forever. Minhó had sacrificed his life with his three friends to save four and a tiny little fifth one hidden in the womb of his lover. And if Minhó had the choice, with knowing everything that would end up

happening he would no waste a single breath before doing it all again.

The ships come into view and Minho is taken aback at the sight of at least ten ships landed on the rooftop. He knew the building was big, but he had underestimated how many ships could fit on the top. Jeongin and Valkyrie are standing outside one ship and Minho makes sure his father is good before he breaks out into a run for that ship. His father, still fit from his years of labour in the fields keeps a good pace, but remains a few paces behind his son.

Jeongin's eyes go wide at the sight of Jisung limp in his hold and the younger suddenly begins to cry, pulling Valkyrie to him as she stares in shock at him. "Hyunjin told us to wait outside!" Jeongin cries. "What happened to him! Is he gonna be okay?" Valkyrie tries her best to console him but the days work has gotten to him and Jeongin wails loudly at the sight of his friend. Valkyrie, although younger than him by several months pulls him close and comforts him as Minho rushes inside.

"He'll be okay," Minho's father says and Jeongin stares at him, sniffing. "Minho says he is strong."

"Yes," Jeongin wipes his tears away, but leans back into Valkyrie's hug. "Lets go in," Valkyrie says, extending a hand to Minho's father to guide him. "Oh no, dear, I've already boarded one of these beauties before, thank you,"

Valkyrie gives him a kind smile.

Minho rushes through the entrance of the ship to Hyunjin's shared room with Valkyrie where the young doctor is with a bunch of equipment in his arms. "Put him on the bed," he demands and Minho follows him quickly, setting him down gently.

There's a loud gasp and Minho turns to see Felix and Seungmin with his mother at the door. Felix bursts out into tears as soon as he sees his friend and pushes his way in before Hyunjin can say anything. Minho doubts he would've rejected his entry anyway. Seungmin stares in shock, his hand tightly held in his mothers.

"What happened?" His voice is soft just as Jeongin squeezes his way through with a rather stoic Valkyrie. "Not sure," Minho responds.

"We can't have you all in here," Hyunjin scolds them gently. "Minnie, if you want to come in you can, but I think your mother needs to rest," Seungmin looks torn but he nods. "Take good care of him," he demands and Hyunjin nods. "Of course." And just as he leaves Minho's father finds his way in with Chan leading him in.

"Shut the door," Hyunjin commands and Chan shuts it behind him and sighs at their friend.

"I thought he looked a little worse for wear..." he mutters, running a hand through his hair. "We shouldn't have left him," Felix cries and Chan bundles him up in a hug. "He said he was okay," Chan mumbles. "It's okay. Hyunjin will make him better,"

"Val," Hyunjin calls gently and at the sound of her name she rushes to his side. She looks exhausted as well and Minho knows well

enough she's probably fought the most out of all of them. Especially after saving Jisung from the crazed man Jisung had recognised as Eunbyul's biological father. Not that it made him one. That was Minho and Jisung's role alone.

"Does anyone know what happened to him at all?" Hyunjin asks as he inserts an iv line into Jisung's hand. "Uhh... not much at the institution but outside... when he was choked,"

"He was choked?" Chan gasps out and Minho winces. "Long story," he whispers and Chan recognises the look of anguish in his eyes right away. "He hurt his ankle," Minho adds on. "But we thought it wasn't that bad because he didn't seem to be in much pain,"

"I should've checked him out then," Hyunjin hisses. "You couldn't," Jeongin reminds him. "Because after that we got a bomb threat,"

"Right," he mutters as he listens to Jisung's chest.

"He was thrown around a lot," Jeongin says sadly. "On the floor by the guards and then he was slammed on the desk, even I winced at that... but he's tough right! Our Jisungie is really tough!"

"Are you kidding me?" Felix whimpers. "Look how tiny he is!" Jeongin's face falls and then his bottom lip wobbles. Felix is nearly inconsolable in Chan's arms.

"There's definitely a broken rib... hopefully no lung puncture but by

the sound of his chest I think he's clear of that. But it must be incredibly painful for him to breathe at the moment,"

"Should we prop him up a bit?" Minho suggests and Hyunjin nods his head. "I've run an iv to hopefully replenish electrolytes and help him feel a bit better once he wakes but I can't really assess his head until he's awake. Not here on the ship anyway,"

Hyunjin carefully lifts his hip and Valkyrie passes him a cotton ball with disinfectant. He cleans the shallow wound on his hip and puts a small bandaid on it.

"He should wake up soon..." He locks eyes with Minho. "Should I be worried about a possible relapse?" Minho blinks and wets his dry lips with his tongue. "Potentially... he did look a bit out of it but I don't know..."

"Lamps on then," Hyunjin says and turns on the warm light just before Chan reaches for the main switch, turning off the brighter lights in the room.

"So sorry Mr Lee," Hyunjin says to Minho's father. "I know you'd really like to stay with Minho right now but... this could potentially become a very delicate situation so we're going to have to leave Minho and Jisung alone," The man blinks a few times before managing a small smile. The disappointment in his eyes is clear but he reads the room quickly, especially when he locks eyes with his son.

"I'll explain it later," he promises. "But until he wakes up I think it's

best,”

“Come on,” Hyunjin slowly shuffles away. “There’s water in this cup here,” Valkyrie points to the side table where a cup with a lid sits. “If he does wake distressed and you need help, call through the comms, we’ll answer right away.”

Minho gives them a nod and watches at the room empties out until it’s just him and Jisung once more. He stares at Jisung for a few seconds before he carefully picks him up and scoots him over so there’s room for him to lay down too.

In the lowlight Minho traces his features with his eyes, staring at him as he takes little breathes, each one with a small wheeze of effort at the end.

He feels the ships engine turn on by the soft rumbling that had always put Eunbyul to sleep and when he feels them take off, Jisung shifts.

Minho sits up, watching him carefully.

When he does wake a few seconds later, there’s a soft cry and then he’s shooting upright, clutching at his chest and when his head whips around, Minho finds his eyes wide with fear.

“Hey, hey, it’s just me. You’re safe here. I carried you onto the ship and Hyunjin treated you. You’re okay,”

“My baby?” He asks shakily and Minho’s chest aches at the uneasiness in his voice. “Eunbyul’s with Fern were going to her now, okay?” And relief washes over him when Jisung relaxes, settling back into the pillows behind him.

“We’re good,” Minho whispers through the comms. Hyunjin replies back with a soft sigh and a gentle command to stay with him until he’s ready.

“Did I burn bright enough?” Jisung asks softly and Minho chuckles quietly, shifting closer to rest his palm on his abdomen. “Like the sun,” Minho whispers into his ear. “Bright and beautiful,”

It’s quiet for a few seconds until Jisung speaks, his voice shaky. “Minho?”

“Hmm?”

“I think I need a wave to cool me down,” Minho reaches out for him and tucks him into his arms, pressing a kiss to the crown of his head.

“Sleep,” he tells him in a soft voice. “I’ll look after you,”

When Jisung wakes a few hours later, Minho is right by his side, an arm slung gently over his middle and his hand gripping at his hip. The ship is still buzzing softly with the telltale sign that they have yet to arrive back at Mydar.

Other units that were less involved with fighting were to stay back and help everyone to get back. They weren't going to clean the city. There was nothing left to take, nothing of importance except the few things families wanted to take along with them.

Jisung's throat feels like sandpaper when he swallows. After a rest and allowing his body to relax, the pain that he had ignored while high on adrenaline and plan ignorance to focus on the tasks he had to do, he hadn't realised the amount of pain he truly was in.

His throat feels tender, and he's sure there must be some type of mark around his throat where the man's hands had been and the president's. His ankle is stiff, aching and Jisung knows without standing up that he's not going to be able to put any weight on it for a while.

Minho shifts beside him and sits up slowly. "How do you feel?" He asks quietly, his fingers drawing patterns across his middle. "Like shit," Jisung answers honestly. And not just physically. He feels like he needs to cry, he wants to scream and tear his hair out but he clenches his fists and breathes in shakily. His lungs hurt and his eyes flicker shut in a response.

"Here," Minho reaches over him and grips the glass in his hand. He takes the lid of the cup and gently presses it to Jisung's lips. "Water,"

he says quietly and in the dim light, Jisung sees how tired he looks too. "What about you?" He asks before Minho puts the glass to his lips. "Chan gave me some while you were asleep,"

The water soothes his sore throat and as it travels down his oesophagus is a welcome coolness that the rest of his body lacks. "I want to hug Eunbyul," he whispers softly. He misses his baby daughter and the way her smile would instantly improve his mood. Jisung is obsessed by her little smile and his heart clenches at the thought of her. Sometimes he can't believe he had made her and that she was his. Minho smiles at him and helps him sit up when he holds out a hand. "We're almost back," he whispers.

Jisung stares at him for a while, marking the soft shape of his lips and the curve of his jaw in the warm light. "Did you really think I was a little ember?" Minho blinks at him before he smiles, something so genuine it feels Jisung feeling the way he did when he had first kissed him.

"From the start," Minho whispers, cupping his cheek, his fingers dancing across the line of his jaw. His touch is so tender, so loving that Jisung feels his tears slip. Minho doesn't look concerned about these tears, he reads him as if words were plastered over Jisung's face instead of emotions that others sometimes struggled to distinguish.

"I think I loved you from the start... not the way I love you now but I admired you... I thought you were strong... stronger than I could ever be when you felt small in everyone's eyes. When you were scared and didn't know how to accept your own emotions. But I fell hard," Minho leans in and captures his lips in a soft kiss. Jisung reaches out and holds his shoulders, his lips quivering as he listens to his lover. "But I wasn't going to rush you because your growth as a person was more important to me than being selfish and putting my

feelings for you first. I think I realised I loved you in that cave. I admit, it wasn't easy for me then either but I just wanted to care for you but slowly... really slowly because I didn't want to scare you,"

"But it took me so long," Jisung whispers through a quiet sob. "I know," Minhø kisses the tip of his nose. "But that memory is etched into my mind. The way you looked under the moon and how my heart felt it was going to stop from the way it was beating so hard. But I was proud that night, too. Proud of you for coming so far."

"Stop it," Jisung tells him quietly. "You praise me so much for nothing while you did so much for all of us. You fixed the boat, you always found things to eat and you cared so much. You took care of Eunbyul when I couldn't be there, but you have never asked for anything. You don't understand how grateful I am to you. Not just as a lover, but as a friend, a confidant, a parent."

"But I don't need anything. I have everything I'll ever need here. You, in my arms, our daughter and our family we found along the way. My fathers here too now. That's what important to me,"

"We're going to build a home now," Jisung tells him with and his heart flutters with anticipation to finally have a place to call home with Minhø by his side. Minhø chuckles softly. "I know. Mydar is not nearly big enough for everyone now,"

"And we need celebrations to happen regularly so we can see everyone. The City of Sivra will always be special to me," Jisung says. "And what if Valkyrie and Hyunjin go to Scalva?"

“We’ll visit lots if that’s what they choose,” Minho kisses his cheek just as there’s a rumble and the engine slowly turns off.

“Well, looks like we’ve arrived, Sungie,”

Minho slides out of the bed and helps him shuffle over. The iv tugs in his hand and Minho quickly retrieves the stand and wheels it closer to Jisung before helping him up. Jisung hisses at his ankle and Minho frowns. “Is it that bad?”

“The adrenaline has all worn off now,” Jisung says through gritted teeth. “I hadn’t realised how good of a painkiller it was until now,”

“I’ll help you, just lean on me,”

Jisung puffs out a pained breath as he takes a step towards the door. Minho stops after he whimpers as they near the door. “Hang on,” Minho breathes out as he checks his iv. The bag is almost empty and Minho hums as he unhooks the bag from the stand and hands it to Jisung.

Jisung frowns at the bag but clutches it to his chest with the hand that doesn’t have the line in it. “What are you doing?”

“Gonna carry you,” Minho mutters as he reaches out for him. “You’re in too much pain,”

“And you look tired,” Jisung shoots back. “You don’t have to,”

“But I will,” Minho bends and picks him up with little struggle. Jisung sighs but melts into his hold. “See? I’m more than capable of carrying you,”

“I’ll remember that,” Jisung scoffs when Minho struggles to get the door open, but he makes it in the end.

The early morning light reveals itself as they step out of the closed up room that usually belonged to Hyunjin and Valkyrie. Jisung’s eyes squint at the sudden light, but he quickly adapts and sees Jeongin across the main room.

He looks relived and in much better shape than what Jisung feels like. He recalls being cradled in his arms and he smiles softly. He’d have to find something to thank him with for helping him. And Valkyrie for saving him from potential death.

“You look better,” Jeongin tells him quietly and his eyes flicker to Minho. “But you both look tired,”

“Could sleep for a week,” Minho muses. “Where’s Hyunjin?” Minho asks Jeongin but the young man shrugs. “I’m not too sure I only just woke up too. Why?”

Minho gestures to Jisung. “I think he needs another check over,”

“You and your endless worrying,” Jisung clicks his tongue at his lover. “It’s because I love you,” Minho counters back and Jisung huffs against his shoulder. “But I want to see my baby,” Jisung whines high in his throat. “Our baby needs us,”

“I’m starting to think you need her more than she needs you,” Jeongin snorts and Jisung shoots him a glare and Minho laughs softly. “Maybe,” Minho shrugs. “But she’s always the happiest with him,”

“She loves me,” he coos. “But she’s more playful with you, she prefers to play around with you,”

“You’re her safe person,” Minho tells him and Jisung’s heart flips in his chest. Another person enters into the sitting area, exiting from what was normally Jisung’s and Minho’s own room.

Minho’s father looks much more refreshed from when Jisung last saw him and he smiles at the both of them when he sees him. “Dad,” Minho breathes out when he sees him.

“You look better after some sleep,” his father says but then suddenly he sucks in a deep breath as if he’s trying to keep down tears. “When did you get so big?” His voice is small and breaks at the end. “I grew pretty quickly, didn’t I?”

“And wonderfully, too,” his father makes his way over and Jisung begins to feel rather awkward being held in Minho’s arms while his

father stands before them. "I'm so glad to have you back... and a new person to add to our family," he looks at Jisung while saying that and Jisung feels his cheeks flush. Really, the man is going to get the surprise of his life when he finds out he's already a grandfather. Jisung suddenly feels a little apprehensive to suddenly throw such big news onto him after hours of realising his son is still alive.

"Minho," Jisung whispers quietly and the said male suddenly holds him a bit tighter. "Dad, come with us, we have a little house here that you can stay in with us until we sort out everyone's accommodation,"

"We're gonna need to build a new settlement," Jisung comments and Minho hums in agreement.

"This is Mydar," Minho tells him as they begin to walk out of their ship. "It's the place we escaped to... quite a few memories were made here,"

"I'll say," Jeongin mutters under his breath as he trails behind them.

"The leaders were nice enough to take us in," Jisung tells him quietly. "And now they're like my mothers,"

"In-laws," the man laughs and Jisung's cheeks heat.

The moment they step off the ship and into the landing dock, his father gasps. "What is this place?"

“A big ass tree,” Minho laughs and his father whistles in response. “But metal,”

Minho’s father looks around in awe as they walk through Mydar, the people that had stayed behind throwing petals at them for their safe return. “Thank you,” Jisung whispers to a woman that passes him a lavender mist that he knows Minho had traded frequently for. Minho was obsessed with dousing the scent on their daughter, on her clothes and in her hair after bath time but Jisung had no quarrels with that. It suited her perfectly.

“She has cried a lot,” she tells them softly. “Fern had requested help but she’s been the fussiest I’ve ever seen her,” Jisung’s heart hurts at the information and Minho picks his speed up a little bit after that. And still, Minho’s father is oblivious to the reason why they’re suddenly in a hurry. But he hurries after them, not questioning his son’s quickening pace.

They enter the bubble that contains their little home as well as Fern and Isa’s residence. “Why are we running?” Minho’s father calls and Minho truthfully hadn’t realised he had begun to run but the knowledge that your baby has been inconsolable for almost two days has him in a hurry.

They stop outside their residence finally and Jisung hurriedly types in the code to open the doors. “Dad,” Minho breathes as the doors unlock. “Promise me you won’t be too shocked?”

“Well it depends!” He says with wide eyes. “But you’ve got me worked up with the running,”

“Put me down,” Jisung whines in his throat when Minho hesitates. “No,” he grits out. “You can’t run to her,”

“I’ll try!” He wiggles in his arms but Minho doesn’t put him down, knowing his ankle couldn’t support his weight anymore.

Jisung attempts to open the door with his leg and then Minho slides it open, gesturing to his dad to follow them in.

“This is your house?” He gapes at the sphere like architecture and Minho nods as he walks into the living room where he’s expecting to see Eunbyul and Fern.

Minho drops Jisung softly down onto the lounge and just as his dad wanders over, he hears her cry out and Jisung flinches at it, his body responding to the instinctual desire to comfort his baby. “Fern?” Minho calls out and suddenly the door to their shared bedroom opens and the woman steps out, looking tired with their sobbing daughter.

“Oh my god,” she sighs out, relief heavy in her expression. She knew they had made it back safe, Isa had updated her along the journey regularly. See eyes Minho’s father quickly before she rocks the little girl in her arms.

“Eunbyul,” Jisung calls out, his arms outstretched for his daughter.

She responds right away at his voice, her little head turning and when she spots him she lets out a loud cry, making grabby hands for him. Fern gets the hint that Jisung's injured and carries her over to him. "Oh my baby," Jisung grabs her around her waist and she clings onto him. "Dada, dada, dada," she repeats, her hands fisting at the shirt he's wearing. "Dada," she says between her cries that are slowly quieting. Minho comes and sits next to Jisung, running a hand through her soft brown curls. She recognises the touch and her bottom lip wobbles at him. Jisung cups the back of her head, breathing in the scent of lavender from her.

"Daddy," she whispers, reaching out a hand to pat Minho's cheek softly.

"Did you miss Dada and Daddy that much?" He asks her quietly, not entirely sure if she'll understand the whole sentence. "Dada, Daddy," she replies, rubbing her cheek against Jisung's shoulder.

"She was alright the first hour," Fern says quietly, looking like a huge weight has been lifted off her shoulders at the sight of her granddaughter calm in her parents hold. "She didn't even calm when she had her bottles,"

Jisung pouts and presses a kiss to her temple. Then slowly his eyes flicker to Minho's father gaping at them a few feet away. Jisung nudges Minho gently and he sits up, offering his hand when Eunbyul whines when she loses sight of his face.

"Uh... Dad?" He calls out and the man slowly begins to walk towards them.

Eunbyul is still unsettled in Jisung's arms, rubbing her cheek against him and pulling at his shirt. Jisung presses his lips together and looks up at Fern.

"This is Eunbyul," his daughter perks up at her name and lifts her head enough so his father can see her face. Hesitantly, his father comes and sits by Minho, looking at the baby's face. "This is our daughter," he says softly.

She continues to pull at Jisung's shirt and he can tell she's growing impatient. He tugs on side of his shirt out of where its tucked into the waistband of his pants and pulls out the arm thats not holding her against his body. Minho notices and gives him a soft look. "I'm gonna nurse her," he explains softly, a little awkward with Minho's father staring at her. "She's quite upset right now,"

"Byul," Minho calls as Jisung struggles to free his arm from its sleeve. She looks over at Minho, giving Minho's father a clear look at her face. Her little nose is reddened from crying and her eyes are slightly puffy, and her lips are wet with tears still. "She's beautiful," he comments slowly. He watches as she turns back to Jisung, clinging to him.

"Dada, dada," she whines out, on the verge of crying again. "It's okay, Byul," he tells her in a soft tone as he finally frees his arm from its confines and can now pull up his shirt.

"Don't mind us," Jisung says quietly as he picks up Eunbyul in his arms, softly laying her in his arms and cradles her head in the nook of his arm. She latches on quickly and Jisung sighs at the pressure reliving from his tender chest. They didn't nurse as much as they used to, but during times she was clearly upset it helped. Her little

hand comes up to cup Jisung's cheek, staring up at his face while she feeds with little suckling noises.

"I know it must be a shock," Jisung says quietly as Eunbyul sucks away. "Everything," he whispers.

"I was glad to find my son alive," he tells him, unable to tear his eyes away from the baby in Jisung's hold. His eyes shine with awe. "And to see that he found a life partner," he finally looks at his face and smiles, tears sparkling in his waterline.

"I wasn't expecting to find a granddaughter after finding you alive," he says to Minho and he chuckles softly. "It was a surprise for everyone really," Jisung says. "I had forgotten I had... gone through a procedure when we were on the run until the symptoms really started to show..."

"She's not my biological daughter," Minho says but he smiles widely at his father. "But I earned the title of being her father."

"He's a very good dad, too," Jisung says with a smile. Minho's father beams with them, ruffling his sons hair.

"So... I don't want to make you uncomfortable but did you... you really carried her?" He asks Jisung quietly. Jisung hums, nodding his head. "I did," he confirms. "Grew her for eight months and gave birth to her within hours of arriving here," the man's eyes widen.

“It was a complicated pregnancy and birth because we were on the run,” Jisung explains. “But she’s healthy and a very happy little girl,” he gazes down at her puffy eyes from crying and his heart clenches. “Most of the time,” he adds quietly.

“Her name is Eunbyul?” She looks around the room at her name and looks at Minhø’s dad while nursing. “Yeah,” Minhø nods. “Han Eunbyul. All of our kids will have his name,” Minhø says. “He’s going to do all the work making them,”

“More?” His father looks between them and they slowly nod.

“Oh my god,” Minhø’s father whispers beneath his breath. “This is going to be so fun,”

Minhø snorts at him and Eunbyul reaches out for him, pulling him close and she then unlatches, frowning softly. “Eunbyul,” she says and Minhø looks at Jisung but he shrugs, unsure what she’s trying to say. “Daddy,” he pokes Minhø’s cheek and then leans back against Jisung. “Dada,” She says before looking at Minhø’s dad.

“Oh, she wants to know who you are!” Minhø says and pulls his dad close. “Grandpa!” Minhø tells her. “Pa!” She replies before pointing at him. Minhø nods and she repeats it before snuggling against Jisung and watching the man with wide eyes.

Jisung laughs at the look on Minhø’s father’s face. The old man promptly breaks out into tears, crying into his hands.

Notes for the Chapter:

GUYS IM EMOTIONAL DONT TOUCH ME!!!!

I cannot believe we are so close to the end (well I've finished writing already) AND I WANT TO CRY but new works are coming and im having fun!! My next long fic is txt tho!! I like variety lol

No i did not forget to update this again... no...

Also not edited again bc I genuinely dont have the brain capacity atm lol

ANYways pls tell me what ur favourite scene(s) are bc im genuinely interested!!

Ask me questions [here!](#)
[my twt!](#)

61. 60 →

Jisung can barely fathom the previous days events when he wakes up the next morning. He knows what they had done, he remembers the details of the fights they had but there's something blurring these memories from him, like a sheen of fog. But Jisung doesn't really mind. Its peaceful in the morning, different to other mornings they've had before.

Eunbyul is tucked in his arms after having refused to part from him for even a minute while he bathed. Minho had tried his best to calm her but it hurt them both to see her so distraught and they gave into her and allowed her to stay with Jisung for as long as she wants. Jisung doesn't mind at all, he'd never refuse her needs or wants and it makes him feel loved and needed when she relies on him. And he likes being with her, studying her face like he doesn't know to dip of her nose and the curve of her smile.

This morning is peaceful unlike others because the looming threat is gone, the worry that they'd be ambushed and taken back is now not at the forefronts of their minds, but tucked away, not gone because the effects of this situation will probably last a lifetime. There's no ticking time bomb, there's no gruelling training drills. Instead, the bed is warm with the shared body heat of him and Minho and the sunlight that's pouring into their room is comforting.

Jisung longed to see this, see the sun after he got what he needed. The light looks the same, pale golden light highlighting the tips of Minho's features and turning the outline of Eunbyul's brown hair into strands of molten gold, but the meaning behind it makes tears spring into his eyes.

From a time in his life where Jisung barely saw the sun to months in the bright light, burning his skin and strengthening it to contend with the rays. But during that time Jisung had feared each day in the sun would be his last. He feared one day it would be ripped from him and when Minho uttered the words ‘overmorrow’ to him, it had struck something so deep inside him.

The light reminds him of his struggles, of his fight that he came out on top with. It’s the taste of victory in this mouth instead of destruction he had so badly wanted to taste. It’s a welcome difference.

Jisung has learnt about himself during this time, how to be strong, how to trust and how to love in more ways than one.

It’s a journey Jisung would have never thought he would’ve taken in his life, but it’s now a welcome one. It wasn’t easy but Jisung is proud, not of just himself but his friends—the ones that became his family after all this time. If Jisung could say anything to his past self he’d probably give his past self a smile that even he sometimes finds incredible that he is capable of such good emotion that it expresses through his face, but he’d say that he’s proud, that he shouldn’t ever lose his sight and that he is much stronger than he believes.

Jisung sits up with Eunbyul when she stirs quietly, blinking her big hazel eyes up at him before breaking out in a smile, snuggling into his hold.

“Hey baby girl,” he whispers, pressing a kiss to her head. Shes in a better mood already, Jisung can tell by the way her legs bounce with happiness as she stands, her arms wrapped around his neck.

“Dada,” she coos quietly and Jisung holds back his squeal at her because how cute can his kid get?

“Are you ready for breakfast?” He asks her and she jumps in his lap at the mention of food. Jisung kisses her again before taking a look at Minho. He’s still asleep, one arm resting over his bare stomach and the other outstretched, reaching instinctively for his lover and child.

“Let’s let daddy sleep, hmm? We’ll make him breakfast later,” Jisung tells Eunbyul and she babbles out a response, giving him a nod. Jisung stands and tiptoes out of the room quietly. The door shuts softly behind them and as soon as Jisung turns he finds several people inside his home all around the kitchen.

A small gasp leaves his lips and Eunbyul coos loudly, rocking excitedly in her father’s arms. “Mother Barbada!” Jisung calls out at the woman who’s surrounded by his friends, her spoon in her hand. The scent of the spices she uses in her cooking reaches Jisung’s nose and his stomach groans, alerting him of how hungry he really is. He hadn’t eaten in almost two days at this point and he feels the aching emptiness in his stomach, begging to be fed.

“Jisung, my dear! Come have a seat at the table, I’ve almost finished breakfast for you all!” She beams brightly at him and waves at Eunbyul who excitedly waves back at her. “Where is Minho?” Jisung turns to Eunbyul’s grandfather and smiles as he pulls a chair out for him. “He’s still asleep,” Jisung tells him. “I don’t want to wake him. He needs his sleep.” Minho had stayed up looking after Jisung the night in the ship, neglecting himself to take care of Jisung.

Hyunjin had come around in the afternoon after getting back and had bandaged his ankle better, tight enough so it was supported. It still hurt to walk but Hyunjin said the more he walks on it, sparingly of course, it would heal quickly.

Valkyrie is playing peak-a-boo with Eunbyul across the table, her hair a mess around her as if she'd only just crawled out of bed too. Her braid is still intact at the side of her skull as is Hyunjin's own. Odin is next to his daughter, looking too large for the table as he watches his daughter interact with Eunbyul. "Rie Rie!" Eunbyul squeals at the woman and the table erupts in cheers.

"She can talk more!" Jeongin cheers. Jisung's surprised his not with his own family or that he hadn't invited them over to Jisung and Minho's residence.

Jisung frowns when he thinks about it.

"How the hell did you all get in here?" He questions with a glare and then Fern pokes her head from around the corner, her hands on the shoulders of a certain little girl. "I told you I knew the password!" Jaein says to him as she bounds over, full of energy. "Youngho knows shes here," Fern informs him. "He's not there, though,"

"I tried to play with Eunbyul," she tells him as she comes to sit by his side, looking at the baby who is now paying her attention. "Now she is happy," she observes and then peers up at him. "Because she's with you?"

"I'm her parent," Jisung tells her. "She feels safe with me," he hopes

this doesn't spiral down into another conversation about why Jisung doesn't like her father but Jaein seems content with that answer.

"So, was this all planned or?" Jisung asks his friends that are sitting around the table. He sees Felix curled up with Seungmin at the other end of the table, Seungmin's mother sitting by them with a small smile on her face.

"A bit of both," Seungmin replies as he indulges in Felix's cuddles. "Felix and Chan say they have something to tell us, ominous as it is," Changbin says as he comes over to the table, putting down a plate of fresh sliced bread. "It's a happy day," Jeongin interjects. "I think it's good news,"

"We should make a holiday or something," Valkyrie yawns, resting her head against Hyunjin who slips an arm around her waist, holding her close. There's a satisfied smile on her lips at the action.

Minho's father gets up from his seat and hurries over to the kitchen. "To celebrate the victory we had,"

"Maybe next year," Jisung laughs quietly as Eunbyul dives for the bread. She successfully grabs a slice and shoves it into her mouth, sucking on it before taking a nibble. "Let's get the most rest we can for a year before we do anything extra,"

"Right," Isa says this time, placing a dish of cut up fruit on the table. Eunbyul dives for them too, but Jisung reaches out himself for the sake of everyone else to not have food destroyed by his child's grubby hands. He holds the piece of mango in front of her lips and

feels her mouth around the piece of fruit before he lets go.

“We’re going to have our hands full building the settlement for a while,” she adds on.

The plans had been proposed the day they came back with all the refugees. It was obvious there wasn’t enough room to house them comfortably and where The City of Sivra could easily hold most of them, they understood that these people had been through a lot and the jarring change in not only temperature but culture and environment, it might be too much of an adjustment for many of them.

Mydar was great, but the architecture of the settlement was designed in such a way that only small renovations could be supported.

For now, the camp below Mydar is filled with families, sheltered from the cold and the rain but it’s squishy and Jisung understands it’ll be rather uncomfortable for everyone down there until they build up this new settlement.

But first they have to find a good spot to build said place.

“Well we all will be very busy, then,” Mother Barbada concludes as she places down a pot filled with dhal. Chan passes out cups and Minho’s father comes by with two large jugs, one filled with fresh juice and the other with tea.

“What the hell?” Comes Minho’s voice and Jisung turns where he was reaching to put fruit on Jaein’s plate. “Hi,” he says softly before going back to his task at hand. Jaein smiles brightly at him. “Juice?” He asks and she nods, holding her cup out to him.

“A celebration feast,” Valkyrie tells him. He wanders over, plonking next to his father, still a bit disoriented from sleep.

“And an announcement,” Felix says, beaming as he stands with Chan by his side. Jisung looks at the couple and finds the eldest’s eyes a little puffy, but his face is bright and Jisung’s heart warms at the sight. Jisung knows what’s coming and he gives him a thumbs up and a smile. Felix holds onto Chan’s hand and takes a deep breath.

“We’re having a baby!” He exclaims and the table instantly is in an uproar of congratulations and shouts of surprise.

Jisung sits back and watches. Chan pats Felix’s stomach fondly and Eunbyul claps her hands.

“Hang on,” Changbin glares at Jisung who looks to relaxed at the news. “You knew!” He points and accusing finger at him. “Of course I did,” Jisung scoffs. “I’m his best friend,”

“He was the first person I told,” Felix says, happy in Chan’s arms as he watches his friends bicker. Jaein is eating quietly, observing them silently. “Even before Chan?” Jeongin gapes and Felix nods as he sits, reaching for the bread.

“He told me in the institution,” Jisung mutters as he adjusts Eunbyul in his lap after she decides the bread isn’t what she wants and tugs at his shirt. Jisung lifts his shirt and she latches on quickly, her hands reaching up to his face as she feeds.

“Oh my god, you knew and still went?” Changbin screeches loudly, dropping his spoon.

Mother Barbada scoffs at him and Jisung rolls his eyes. “And you wonder why Jisung was the only one to know all this time,”

“People who have gone through it can only truly sympathise with pregnancy,” Mother Barbada tells them. “I believe it was a wise decision, Felix,”

“Me too,” Jisung echoes. “If you told these knuckleheads early our victory wouldn’t have probably been so clean,”

“Thank god I thought it through,” Felix sighs as he eats a strawberry.

“Can I name the baby?” Jeongin asks and Felix shoots him a glare. “No way,” Felix frowns. “Damn,” hisses Jeongin.

→

The boys they rescued from the institution had the luxury to live in Mydar until the settlement is built. Hyunjin wants to keep an eye on them to make sure none of them develop the same sickness as Jeongin.

Now, Jisung and Felix are knocking on their door. Eunbyul is held in Jisung's arms. Where she's much happier today, she still refuses to part with him.

Jisung realises that he doesn't know any of their names when one of the boys come to let them in.

They look to be in better spirits after some good sleep and good food and it settles his worry with how well they look after two days.

"Hi," the boy waves at them and peers at Eunbyul in interest.

"Hi," Jisung greets back. He recognises the boy that opened the door to be one of the two boys they saved from an egg retrieval. He's tall, much taller than himself but he carries himself in such a way that makes him seem small. He steps to the side and invites them in.

"How are you all doing?" He asks him, adjusting Eunbyul in his arms so he can have a free hand. "Better," he answers softly. "It's warm and comfortable here and theres food... it's nice," he looks down at his feet as the two go further into the residence. The other four are sitting around in the lounge room, playing a game with cards around the coffee table.

Jisung takes a seat on the lounge, his hands running down his daughters back quietly to soothe her even in her sleep. The four boys stop playing and turn their attention to Felix and Jisung, stopping the game and slowly coming to take their own seats around the lounge.

“How is everyone doing? I hope this visit isn’t too weird,” Felix chuckles softly, careful to not wake up Eunbyul.

“Much better,” one of the shorter boys answers with a smile. “Thank you again... we owe you our lives,” Jisung only smiles at them.

“Well... how about we get to know each other a bit better?” He suggests as the boy who answered the door takes a seat by himself. “I mean if you guys want too, of course,”

“Sure,” one of the boys shrugs. “We know a little about you guys... it was rampant for a while that you broke out so...”

“Well,” Jisung clears his throat, patting his daughters back when she stirs quietly. “Maybe we can tell each other our names and how old we are... maybe how long we were there?” The boys nod their heads in agreement. “I’ll go first,” he says.

“My name is Han Jisung... I’m twenty and this is my daughter Eunbyul,” he gives them a soft smile. “I was there for seven years, and when we broke out I didn’t know I was pregnant,” he explains in a soft voice.

“And I’m Felix!” Felix cheers, lifting the mood up drastically. “I’m twenty as well. Actually, Jisung and I are a day apart, which is pretty cool... I was there for six years... oh, and I’m expecting my first baby!”

“Congratulations,” one of the boys say with a smile. Others give their congratulations but one boy is quieter than the rest of them, isolated on the furthest lounge. Jisung eyes him until he shifts in his seat understanding it’s a cue for him to talk.

“Umm... Choi Beomgyu,” the boy mutters in a soft timbre. “I’m nineteen... I’ve been there for... well I entered when you guys left but I had been undertaking treatment two years earlier...” the boy trails off and looks to the boy sitting closest to Felix. Jisung recognises him as one of the boys they saved from the egg retrieval along with Beomgyu. “I’m Wooyoung I’m older than you both,” he laughs softly, scratching the back of his neck. “I’m twenty-one, I was like Beomgyu I didn’t stay in there until you guys broke out, five years in total if you count not living there,”

“Jungwon,” the next boy waves. His face is young, showing he’s probably the youngest amongst them all. “I’m sixteen,” Jisung’s mouth feels dry when he reveals his age. “I got called in maybe a year ago? I’m not too sure about the time my mind’s a bit fuzzy... I have only just got the hormone chip done a few weeks ago,”

Which meant he had only just finished the first step. He had grown his womb and had been on the cusp of entering the second stage where they regulated a cycle.

“Thank you for saving us,” He adds quietly and Jisung smiles softly at him. “Of course,”

The last two boys are sitting next to each other, looking at Jisung and Felix rather intently.

“Jaeyun,” the one furthest away speaks. “Eighteen. I got taken in a few weeks after you guys left,” it makes him feel a little guilty that some of these boys had only come in because they left. But what’s done is done and Jisung decides to not dwell on it for too long. “And I’m Sunoo,” the last boy says quietly. “I’m seventeen and I entered with Jungwonnie,”

“Well... I know everything is a little overwhelming right now and if theres anything we can do to help you feel more comfortable, please let us know,” Jisung offers with a smile. “Mydar is a safe place. Nobody is going to hurt you like they did in The Capital. I won’t say to forget it because we know first hand that you won’t and maybe even saying that it gets better will be hard to swallow... I hated it so much. I didn’t think my life would be worth living after it all but there is something out there that is worth it. To feel the sun on your skin, it’s worth it and if you ever need someone to talk to or maybe even advice we are always around. Usually we hang out around each other, the other guys I mean, but I promise we’ll always have time for you all,”

“Thank you,” Jaeyun whispers. “That really... it means a lot,”

“I’m sorry, too,” Beomgyu mutters out. “That you got left behind out there... the ship, I...” Jisung hums softly. “It’s okay. I didn’t know any of you saw that,” he’s not upset that he saw him in his moment of weakness, too distraught too even think about the five boys he had just saved. Rather, Jisung is upset for potentially scaring the younger man

“Only I did,” Beomgyu says as he watches Eunbyul as she begins to wake up. A little whine leaves her throat and Jisung pats her back, pressing a kiss to her forehead as she stretches. “It wasn’t anyone’s fault,” Jisung tells him because it wasn’t anyone’s fault expect the man that attacked him.

Eunbyul sits up and looks up at Jisung, her eyes still dazed with sleep. “Hi, Byul,” he whispers quietly. “Daddy?” She asks, expecting to also have her other parent around. “Daddy is at home,” Jisung tells her and she frowns softly. “We’re at some new friend’s house now, would you like to say hi?” Eunbyul seems to ponder his question before turning her head around to see where they are.

“Fefe?” Eunbyul says as she spots him. “Hi, Byul!” He waves at her and she copies him, climbing on Jisung’s lap until her back is pressed against Jisung’s stomach. She waves around the room and gains several coos. “Byul,” she says quietly. She pats Jisung’s leg, “Dada,” she waits for a reaction and Jisung smiles fondly as Wooyoung claps his hands. Jaeyun seems pleased at the baby’s antics and holds his chest as she looks around.

“Hello Eunbyul,” Wooyoung coos softly as he gains the courage to sit in front of the baby. “I’m Wooyoung,”

To Wooyoung’s absolute amusement Eunbyul tries to repeat his name. “Woo,” she points to him and Wooyoung’s eyes water, clutching at his chest. “How old is she?” He asks Jisung with wide eyes. “She’s seventeen months,” he tells them as she then begins to try to climb down Jisung’s legs.

“She wants to play, is that okay?” Jisung asks as he grabs her around her middle. Wooyoung’s eyes light up at that and looking around the room, he sees most of them are eager to play with her. The little girl squeals happily when she’s placed on the floor and gets to her feet, dancing on the spot with happiness.

“I just want to ask... you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to... but no one is pregnant, right?”

Felix goes to open his mouth, ecstatic about his pregnancy and Jisung is glad, but he’s not his concern right now. He shoots him a look and Felix pouts, but he understands and joins the rest of the boys on the floor where Eunbyul is running around.

They look around at each other, scanning each other’s faces until they eventually all shake their heads. Jisung feels relief burn through him and without knowing it, he breaks out into tears. Felix is up quickly, taking him into his arms as the rest of them stare quietly, unsure what to do. Eunbyul notices too and whines out. “Dada sad? Dada?”

“No, Byul,” Jisung pulls away from Felix’s hug to show her a smile. “Dada is happy. Relieved,”

Eunbyul smiles again and throws her hands up. “Happy!”

“I’m sorry, guys,” Jisung laughs as he dries his eyes. “I’m just glad you all get to have that bit of choice,” he’s been over this many times how Eunbyul is one of the best things to ever happen to him, but the way he felt during the pregnancy was all types of violated and a mix

of emotions that even know he has troubles trying to figure out.

He's glad that these boys have a choice to whether they wish to carry their own children.

"Changbin and Seungmin said they'd come over today as well," Jisung says after clearing his throat. "They can help you relocate your families in this mess,"

"Really?" Sunoo's eyes sparkle at the mention of his family. "We'll be able to see them again?" Jisung nods, but he can't help but see that not all of them look excited over that. Beomgyu keeps his gaze on the ground, distant.

Jisung decides not to push it.

"And... since The Capital is not a place anyone is going back to... we're going to build another settlement nearby Mydar. If any of you decide to stay and wish for a home for yourselves, let us know,"

It's not much they can offer at this point in time but it's a sprinkle of hope for them. Jisung knows it's needed. They'd need time to heal, too after this experience in their lives and Jisung understands this well.

But he's so relieved that they're here now and not stuck in that blinding white building. He looks at their faces one more time and bites the tears back down.

→

The rest of the night is quiet.

Valkyrie and Hyunjin linger in their home for dinner and leave just as Jisung is ready to pass out flat on his face after the rather emotionally draining day.

Eunbyul had finally allowed Jisung to slip away by himself to shower quickly and to Minhø's dismay, it hadn't been him who she settled with while her dada was gone. Valkyrie was nothing short of ecstatic when Eunbyul cuddled against her, content in her aunts arms.

It's a peaceful night. Eunbyul sleeps through the night in her bassinet beside their bed, letting her parents get a full nights rest.

However, in a juxtaposition, the morning is not peaceful.

The start of their morning is rather normal for them. Mother Barbada hasn't broken in this morning to cook everyone breakfast and Minhø cooks them all breakfast although Eunbyul decides to eat half of it before deciding she wants milk instead which Jisung allows her. Minhø changes their daughters nappy and dresses her in a short sleeve onesie and the purple overalls he picked up not long ago.

Eunbyul decides she hates shoes this morning, but Jisung gets them on her, peppering her cheeks in kisses as a bribe.

It's achingly normal, a sense of newfound peace that they've only just found.

That is until it's not.

Jisung and Minhoo are just barely dressed themselves when there's a bang on their front door and not long after, Jeongin is barging in. His eyes are wide in alarm, his chest heaving as he sucks in deep breaths of air.

"We have a problem," he says and Jisung's heart sinks in his chest. Just as they gain peace something happens. Minhoo senses his sudden spike in anxiety and holds onto his hand. Eunbyul looks up at Jeongin from where she's standing next to Jisung, holding onto his other hand and coos softly.

"Well," He does that thing where his eyebrows knit together and his eyes narrow. "I'm actually not sure if it's that much of a problem... that may be insensitive of me,"

"Jeongin," Jisung grits out, his anxiety getting to him as the younger rattles on.

"Right, right, sorry," he stands up straight now and licks his lips.

“President Hwang is dead,” he states and Jisung’s eyes bludge.

“What!?” He screeches and Eunbyul tugs on his hand, surprised by the sudden noise. Jisung bends down and picks her up, patting her back in an apology.

“What the hell do you mean?” Minho hisses out, his eyes wide too. “Well,” Jeongin swallows thickly and shrugs his shoulders slowly, his eyes darting between the two of them.

“We were supposed to have the interrogation today, you both know that, and Odin, Hyunjin and I went down to get him to bring him to the meeting room but when we got to where he was...”

“Oh my god,” Jisung whispers, his hand cupping the back of Eunbyul’s head. “Was he murdered?” He whispers and Jeongin pauses before he shakes his head softly.

“Uh... there was a bottle,” he says quietly. “Hyunjin said it was poison,”

Minho blinks before a cold laugh escapes him. “I thought he was patted down before he got thrown in?”

“Well, somehow they missed it,” Jeongin groans back. “But I mean... he kind of deserved it,”

“I don’t have any remorse for him. We were merciful enough to keep him alive. Odin could’ve easily killed him up there but he didn’t.” Jisung replies but his heart aches for Hyunjin.

“The interrogation was only going to tell us all the things we knew before, anyways,” Minho sighs, rubbing at his temples. “Maybe it works out best this way?” He says quietly.

“I mean the man was pretty much the definition of evil,” Jeongin concludes, his gaze flickering to the ground.

“And Hyunjin?” Jisung asks their younger friend who purses his lips. “He seemed okay... not that I know he’s not upset but... rather okay for after finding his father dead. He’s testing the poison to see what it is in the lab at the moment. Valkyrie is with him,”

“When is she not?” Minho snorts softly and Jeongin shrugs. “She’s protective of him,”

“We know that,” Jisung says quietly with a soft smile. He’d go and check up on Hyunjin later in the day but for now, he knows he’s in good hands.

“We should probably go to the meeting room anyways, Fern said something about scouting today,” Jeongin then says with a soft smile. “Sorry for scaring the shit out of you guys, adrenaline you know?”

“It’s okay,” Jisung waves him off. “Let’s go together,”

→

The news of the presidents death spreads quickly but it’s not spoken about much. Jisung supposes its because not many people in Mydar actually knew of him and others hated him like they did.

As much as Jisung doesn’t want to appear insensitive, his death is well deserved.

Hyunjin himself isn’t as shaken up as Jisung had thought. He’s was more shocked how they found him but Hyunjin had mourned the loss of his father long ago. There wasn’t much left of him in Hyunjin’s mind and heart and Jisung is glad he had let go when he had.

Valkyrie ensures Jisung that she’ll talk to him more about it later when his mind is clearer and that makes him feel a bit better.

“We have two options,” Fern’s voice echoes throughout the meeting hall. This time, most of the leaders are not present. Queen Malti and Queen Syra had left with their daughter this morning with the promise of sending help if they ever asked, but their city needed them back.

Mother Barbada was supposed to board their ship to go back to her inn but she took one look at the group she took care of for months and shook her head, dropped her bags and declared she must stay with them.

There's not much left for her in The City of Sivra. No family to take care of and he knows she adores taking care of them all and spoiling them like they're her grandchildren.

Volunteers from Mydar fill up the room along with them, eager to continue helping their leaders.

Fern is seated at her usual spot with Isa by her side. Eunbyul is in Isa's lap, blinking happily around the full room and cooing every time her eyes meet her parents' figures near where she's seated on her grandmother's lap.

"We can survey in a ship and look around that way or we can take the ground route. There are vehicles we can send down and survey it closer," she continues, peering around at them to see what is the preferred route.

"We should probably take the vehicles," someone says. Jisung misses who says it but it comes from the group of Mydar volunteers. "It's easier to survey ground when you're closer. The density of the earth will need to be looked at too to see if it could hold construction. It's no use building upon a muddy flat," Jisung finds the person belonging to the voice. His hair hangs into his eyes as he talks, and even where he's leaning onto the table in front of him Jisung can tell he's really tall.

“Right,” Minho agrees with him. “Everything would shift too much... the vehicles are the way to go,”

“We should spilt up and use the comms to update each other. We could go together but it will be quicker and probably less of a hassle to spilt up to see what we each find,” Seungmin pipes up. “Let’s sort into groups. Each vehicle can carry eight people so lets get... sixteen in each group,”

“Do you need Eunbyul to be babysat?” Isa asks quietly and Jisung looks at his daughter who’s beginning to reach for him, whining. He picks her up and settles her in his arms, giving Isa a fond look. “She’s having separation anxiety after all of this,” he explains as he tries to soothe her. “She can come. I think it’ll be a relatively tame adventure.”

“If you say so,” Isa smiles, patting her granddaughters head gently.

It’s cold as they travel in the vehicles.

Jisung quickly zips up his jacket with Eunbyul secured safely inside as a Mydar volunteer points at something ahead. The vehicles are different to the ones they saw in The City of Sivra, instead of the enclosed vehicles that rode through the sand dunes daily, these lack the enclosed feature. The doors are narrow, enough to slip in and out easily and away from the seats so they won’t fall out. There’s a roof over there heads but thats about it. They’re skeletal looking things and each time they go over a bump they have to gripon to the bar above their heads so they don’t get knocked about. Eunbyul giggles at each bump and Jisung is glad she at least likes it. Felix looks ready to

throw himself out and throw up in the grass when he looks over at him.

When the engine finally comes to a halt, Felix is the first to jump out, gagging as he steadies himself on his knees.

“You might have to tie me to the roof instead,” he groans. “Or I’ll walk back, oh god,”

“Welcome to pregnancy,” Jisung winces as he rubs his back. Felix makes a face at him that has him chuckling.

When Jisung peeks inside his jacket where he’s hidden Eunbyul, he finds her fast asleep. He’ll have to keep one arm around her the whole time, but he doesn’t mind. He’s used to carrying her weight around like it’s nothing.

“Woah,” Minho breathes as he wanders over to Jisung and Felix who’s slowly recovering. Chan is now rubbing his back and patting his head softly.

“Look at this place,” Minho points around and finally Jisung takes in the scenery. Mountains surround them on either side, the only passage through a large gap that could easily fit five ships side by side in the pass. The grass is a striking green, littered with bursts of colours. It’s not a sunny day, rather overcast and cold but the air here is nice, fresh and crisp as he breathes in. It’s a large area and it stretches on and on, the mountains bordering the horizon.

“This isn’t that far,” One of the Mydar volunteers says. The man from before, Yeonjun, Jisung had learned before he got behind the wheel with his even taller friend Soobin. “About... forty-five minutes from Mydar? That’s quite a good distance... easily travelled and it looks pretty darn good,”

“It’s beautiful,” Jisung admits and then he spots Valkyrie peering up at the mountains, her jaw slack and her lip ring glinting as she marvels at the sight.

Jisung leaves them to have a conversation after it devolves into the logistics of how a settlement could be built up here. Valkyrie doesn’t look at him as he stops by her side. “They remind me of home,” she says quietly and Jisung’s heart aches softly. Valkyrie has been away for far too long and it didn’t take a genius to understand she’s homesick.

“I like it here,” she finally tears her gaze away and meets Jisung’s eyes. “Hyunjin and I decided to stay here,” she then announces. “I thought about going back but we have family here... all of you... and of course my papa has announced he’s going stay with me... which means he’s stepping down and giving my uncle the position of clan leader... grandmother will probably join us, too,” she whispers. Jisung squeezes her hand with his free hand. “I’m glad,” he tells her honestly. “And remember we can always go to Scalva to visit sometimes. Hell, I’ve been thinking about going back to each settlement throughout the year... it’s just... we were there for mostly business but everything was so... interesting and I think the kids will like the occasional holiday, don’t you think?” Valkyrie snuffles and nods softly. Jisung hadn’t even realised she had actually cried.

“I hope we can settle here,” she whispers softly. “A little house... will we have room to have bonfires in the winter?” She gazes over the

land and hums hopefully. “But we should plant more trees when we have the outline... it’s a bit too open,”

“Just admit you want them so you scare the shit out of everyone when you jump down,” Jisung jokes lightly and the woman beams, a soft laugh escaping her.

“Come on,” he squeezes her hand and leads her back to their group. Hyunjin raises a brow at them and Jisung gives him a smile in return.

“So,” he says as Valkyrie settles next to him, her hand on his shoulder. “What does everyone think?”

“It’s pretty much perfect,” Changbin concludes with a thumbs up.

“We’re going to send a few teams out within the next few days to convey the land and give us some insight to what would be best,” Seungmin adds with a smile. “But I’m pretty sure this is it,”

Jisung laughs softly as he looks at the look on Minho’s face. He’s in that daze of his mind where he’s so obviously imagining things that he forgets about the world around him. He’s staring right at Jisung and Jisung doesn’t need words to understand he’s imagining their future here because he sees it too.

He can imagine them up at the crack of dawn, watching the sun rise into the sky. And maybe they’d both cry out of happiness and in absolute relief because they’ve finally reached their overmorrow.

Notes for the Chapter:

Im crying im so overwhelmed AHHAH i cannot believe this is it... this is the last full chapter of overmorrow and im just so?????? Im so happy but also ill miss this so much... from the singular scene i had first thought of minsung in the middle of the desert and Jisung doing up the bandage to this whole novel length fic aaaaaa thank you everyone for all the comments I've received on this fic they really made me more confident and comfortable in my writing <333

Lets talk about some of our fav scenes in this fic!! Today i was thinking about the scene where the boat capsizes and how they all react in that situation and how they all kind of realise Jisung is very much in love with his baby and terrified is just... ugghhhh also Jisung saving Minho's ass from the bear?? He's a bad bitch! Also any scene with Valkyrie my absolute favourite oc (besides Eunbyul how could u not love her???)

Ask me any questions u have about this fic or anything [here!](#)
[my twt!](#)

With love, Star.

62. 61 →

The valley is chosen to become their new home.

A group tallies up the population that the valley is estimated to have and gathers data about how much housing they'll need to build.

For once they rest.

Each day they're involved in the construction of the settlement and visit frequently to look after all the workers that have signed up to build it up, not for free of course. Mother Barbada sets up her catering services and sends them out to deliver food to the people working hard.

Minho is sneaky and goes to help build with his father more than once and gets an earful from both Jisung and his mother-in-laws when they return haggard and weary from working themselves out. Eunbyul begins to talk more during these months and Felix's middle grows steadily with his son. They had been ecstatic to find out the gender of their baby at his recent ultrasound and Felix has been cooing over it for weeks now how he and Eunbyul are going to get on.

The population of the refugees is more than they had originally expected, over a million are still living in the tents as they build. They claim its not too bad, but Jisung knows it's not comfortable.

They prioritise the refugees homes first and the essentials that they'll need to eventually rely on their own community and not on Mydar and the other settlements helping them out. The estimated date for it's completion is a whole year and a half away which is relatively fast for something of this size but with the amount of hands working around the clock it makes sense. Work will continue around the settlement they've decided to affectionately call "The Valley" even after everyone moves in.

It's exciting for everyone and Valkyrie, Hyunjin, Seungmin and Changbin go to Scalva to employ woodworkers to make different furnishings like dining tables and chairs. Cala employees a group of other citizens of The City of Sivra to haul supplies back and forth for The Valley. It's a rather expensive project to create a whole new settlement but each side takes it in stride to help out as much as they can, claiming it's the least they can do after all they've done for them in return.

Slabs of stone come back to work into benches for kitchens and workrooms, fabrics are donated in bulk and the Queens themselves donate materials to create furniture and framework for new houses.

It's a smooth experience that goes surprisingly well without too many big hiccups. Some workers got hurt during a storm but Hyunjin and his team were quick to fix them up and the site was inspected thoroughly to ensure no more accidents will happen.

Eunbyul's second birthday comes around too quickly and Jisung cries again and Minhoo bawls his eyes out too. Felix cries with them as he clutches onto his middle, his due date steadily approaching.

And before they know it, the time for Felix and Chan's baby to come

arrives. It's a sunny morning in April when Jisung is awoken to Chan knocking on their door. Minhoo stays behind with Eunbyul due to Felix's wishes to have Jisung and Chan as his birthing partners along with Hyunjin and Valkyrie taking care of the medical side but also supporting him.

It's much smoother than Jisung's birth with Eunbyul and he progresses well and quicker than they all expected. In the afternoon, Felix holds his son as he cries in happiness with Chan by his side and Jisung watching them happily. Eunbyul meets him the next day after Felix gets some sleep and is instantly in love with baby Sumin. Jisung cries with Felix as their babies meet and Felix not so subtly reminds him of the promise he made him back in The Capital.

And when Jisung notices he misses his next cycle the month after Sumin's birth, Felix is the first to know (and maybe its the postpartum hormones but he bawls his eyes out again). Minhoo almost faints on the spot when he comes home to Eunbyul running around with a shirt that says 'big sister' in an obnoxious glittery text and Jisung cackles loudly at his reaction.

This time he gets to enjoy his pregnancy in peace and not spend every waking second whether they'll be safe or not. When he tells Valkyrie and Hyunjin she throws him a reserve card and he stares in shock before shouting and hugging the both of them tightly (and of course he cries again over the thought of their babies being born at the same time).

Fern and Isa aren't surprised they're already expecting their second baby but they're happy too and relieved that their houses should be done by the time their babies arrive.

Mother Barbada is over at their house constantly dropping between Chan and Felix's, Hyunjin and Valkyrie's and their own to take care of them all. Seungmin and Changbin adopt the title of the cool uncles, not wanting to have their own children and Jisung respects that because it's hard work. He's sicker this time, bouts of nausea making him have to lay down for hours while Minho wrestles Eunbyul, trying to drain her endless energy.

Jisung makes sure to visit the other boys from the institution regularly to make sure how they're going. They always bring the babies with them, by request and it's honestly a welcome rest for Jisung to just sit there and speak as the others take care of his daughter. Valkyrie begins to hang around him most days, laughing when they compare their growing middles. They find out Valkyrie and Hyunjin are to have a son and Jisung and Minho are over the moon when they learn at he's carrying their second daughter.

Jeongin likes to join their visits and play with the babies. He's been helping out with Mother Barbada most of the time, always enjoying to be her taste tester and get spoiled whenever he offers his help.

The refugees move in first when their houses are completed and they rest of them residing in Mydar for the time being feel like a heavy weight is off their chests when the camps finally clear out and disappear.

They follow a few months later, all living in walking distance of each other in the valley. Jisung and Valkyrie are useless at this time, waddling and struggling to get up after sitting down so the move is particularly hard on them and Valkyrie pushes herself too much and ends up getting lectured by her husband which leads up to her refusing to talk to him for the rest of the move and then Hyunjin is gaining death glares from both the pregnant ones. Minho tries to save

his ass only to get in trouble with Jisung but they make up quickly and Valkyrie gives in after Odin comes and talks to her.

Jisung's own father had wormed his way into The Valley to Jisung's utter disappointment, but he eventually allowed it for Jaein's sake.

Valkyrie has her baby first in her new home with Hyunjin helping her. Odin joins with Felix and Jisung. It's longer than Felix's labour but there's no complications and Odin is a blubbing mess as his grandson emerges. It's a sweet moment and Jisung returns home to a warm bed with Minhoo and Eunbyul cuddling. Two weeks later Jisung goes into labour and the experience is overall better than Eunbyul's but at first his mind overtook and the trauma of his first birth had almost resulted in Hyunjin sedating him for his own sake until the group effort from Minhoo, Felix, Valkyrie as well as Fern and Isa had slowly calmed him down. Minhoo's father was looking after Eunbyul and Sumin with Odin with his grandson, Viggo who he had named himself after they requested it after his birth.

She's born in the middle of the day and Minhoo catches her himself, in awe of both Jisung and their tiny daughter. Jisung is overwhelmed after the birth, not having experienced the rush of emotions after birthing before. She's bigger than Eunbyul, being full term but she's still so tiny. Viggo has been the biggest of all the babies so far, Eunbyul the smallest.

They live a peaceful life that Felix had dreamed about. After the struggles they've had it's even more rewarding to wake up and see his little family and the rest of his family with their own growing families.

The sun rises in the morning, falls at night to be replaced with the

moon. It's a cycle Jisung won't ever get tired of.

Felix has his and Chan's daughter Suji the next winter and Valkyrie follows with her own daughter in the autumn after, Arvid is named after Valkyrie's own mother and when Valkyrie announces her name to her father he holds her in his arms, still cradling her newborn daughter close to her own chest as her father thanks her over and over again.

Jisung falls pregnant again three months after Arvid is born and instantly he feels the difference from his past two pregnancies. He and Minho are in a decent amount of shock when Hyunjin tells them they'll be expecting twins. Their first son and third daughter are born in the middle of the night, quicker than Nabi's birth and a lot more controlled too. Dayeong is born first and Jisung holds him while Chaeyeong is born.

Two years after that Jisung begs Minho to have just one more.

"Look what happens when we play with fire," Minho groans as Jisung smiles brightly. "I don't see why you're complaining. I did perfect last time?"

"Jisung..." he points to the lounge where all four of their children are sitting together. "We're going to have six kids,"

"Surprise, we're really fucking fertile," he laughs and Minho's facade falls quickly and he laughs along with him.

Minho is staring at him as he holds their newborn twin daughters Eunju and Eunji with a smile. “Do you remember what you said to me before Nabi was born?”

“Of course I remember,” Jisung whispers. There’s a smile on his face that is nothing sort of pure bliss. “Give me a second, I just gave birth to two babies, gotta catch my breath,”

“Then maybe I’ll say it?” Minho watches as Jisung’s eyes flutter open. “Go ahead,” he whispers back, locking their eyes together.

“We don’t have to fear that tomorrow won’t come anymore. We don’t have to chase our overmorrow like it’s the only thing keeping us alive anymore, like it’s the only thing tethering us to this earth. Because we caught it. Grabbed it around its middle and brought it right back to us, to everyone. We don’t have to chase our overmorrow now, because it’ll come like the warm sun rising in the sky and continue to do so until the sun burns out,”

Notes for the Chapter:

And here it is... the end of this journey.

For those who feel like they don’t have a tomorrow, chase your overmorrow.

With love, Star.

Ask me any questions u have about this fic or anything [here!](#)
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